



**Understanding International Postgraduate Students' Adjustment in a  
British University: Motivations for Study Abroad and Subsequent  
Academic, Sociocultural and Psychological Experiences**

**XUAN ZHAO**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education, Communication, and Language Sciences

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Newcastle University

UK

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## Abstract

The rapid growth of international student mobility has become an increasingly important feature of the higher education landscape in recent decades (Yu and Moskal, 2019). With the continually growing population of students studying abroad, the subsequent adjustment experiences are receiving greater research attention (Wang, 2018).

Therefore, following a growing trend in the UK research context (Young et al., 2013, Schartner and Young, 2016, Yu and Moskal, 2019), this longitudinal study investigated the adjustment process of full-time taught MA Degree postgraduate international students from the humanities and social sciences at a single British university. The focus was on their motivations for study abroad and subsequent academic, socio-cultural, and psychological adjustment.

A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaire surveys. The qualitative phase aimed to identify students' academic, socio-cultural, and psychological adjustment trajectories over time. The questionnaires were introduced as a complement to measure some specific issues, including perceived benefits of studying abroad, difficulties and relevant coping strategies, friendship, and social contacts (N=120, 108 and 102). Both interviews (N=16) and questionnaire surveys (N=120,108, and 102) were conducted in three stages across a nine-month period: The beginning of students' programs of study (October 2018), the beginning of their second semester (February 2019), and the end of their taught period (June 2019).

The findings indicated that adjustment is a complex process affected by many factors, and 'success' in all three domains' was closely related to the help from co-nationals. The data revealed that the perceived value of the overseas study, personal or family-related reasons, and financial issues were deemed the main factors motivating students to pursue overseas study. The students themselves tended to focus more on academic rather than socio-cultural and psychological adjustment. Therefore, they felt more satisfied with their academic experiences. In the sociocultural domain, due to the issues such as personal agency or perceived cultural distance, international students usually lacked contact with host students. In terms of psychological adjustment, it was found that most of the students had a positive experience, although it was affected by their academic performance at times. Overall, the research data did not support the 'U-curve' hypothesis of adjustment. Various internal or external factors, individual attitudes, and expectations affected the adjustment directly or indirectly.

This research provides theoretical and empirical knowledge on the adjustment of international students in the UK and fills an existing gap in cross-cultural perspectives. This research approach can be adopted in studies within other research contexts, especially in other global Western universities. In practical terms, it increases current knowledge or potentially enriches the quality of support international students when they study in the UK

## **Declaration**

I certify that no material in this thesis has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name and all the materials have been which are not my own work have been identified.

Xuan Zhao



## Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my first supervisor, Dr. Alina Schartner, for her inspiring and insightful advice, warm encouragement, and endless patience. Since the beginning of my PhD study in 2017, we have composed hundreds of emails and many face-to-face meetings. Without her generous supports and guidance, I could not develop and complete the thesis on time. My deepest gratitude also goes to my second supervisor, Professor Tony Young, for his professional feedback, sincere encouragements, and genuine concerns all the time. I am also grateful to my internal and external examiners: Professor Steve Walsh and Dr. Rola Naeb respectively, for their valuable suggestions on my thesis. I appreciate all their efforts to help me become a researcher.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This introductory chapter aims to provide detailed information about why this study is essential and necessary. This chapter is divided into six parts. Firstly, the general background of the study is given (1.1). Secondly, personal motivations for conducting this research are presented (1.2), followed by the third part, which concerns the internationalization of higher education globally and in the UK (1.3). Fourth, research aims are described in detail (1.4). Fifth, a discussion of the study's significance is introduced (1.5), followed by a description of the thesis's structure (1.6).

### **1.1. Introduction**

The internationalization of higher education (HE) has become a worldwide phenomenon since the late 1990s (Iannelli and Huang, 2013, Chien, 2020). In today's context, universities worldwide have become more internationalized (Wang, 2018). Students' composition is increasingly international, with many more students furthering their studies away from their home countries (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019). The number of students who study abroad reached 5 million in 2016 (Gündüz and Alakbarov, 2019) and came to 7 million in 2020 (HESA, 2020). Although numbers are increasing across Europe, the United Kingdom (UK) remains the leading European destination country and the second most popular globally after the United States (US) (Schartner and Young, 2016). Therefore, increasing knowledge of the international students' motivations to study abroad, their adjustment experiences, and difficulties would help them achieve their educational goals easier and help the university better understand their academic needs to provide adequate support.

In response, this chapter offers insights into the factors influencing the internationalization of higher education and an in-depth account of how this research differs from the previous studies. Additionally, the structure of the thesis and research aims will also be add.

### **1.2. Personal rationale: My experiences as a taught postgraduate international student in the UK**

While considering pursuing overseas study, the US, the UK, and Hong Kong were the most popular postgraduate studies destination. I had been to the US for travel during my undergraduate years, and Hong Kong is a part of China, which was not an option for me as I hoped to experience something new and different. Therefore, I decided to study in the UK. There were some advantages to do so, including more options for the renowned universities, relatively easy application process, and relatively short duration of master's program. For instance, unlike applying for postgraduate programs in the US, which requires a GRE

(Graduate Record Examinations) or GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), the application process in the UK is more straightforward, which only needs undergraduate transcripts and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) certificates. It was also excellent news that doing a master's degree in the UK only costs one year, shorter than a two-year program in the US.

My first impression of the UK was not all the same before arrival. I used to learn about British culture from English literature, textbooks, films, websites, etc. Before coming to the UK, the impressions were about its various ancient, magnificent, and beautiful buildings, such as churches, castles, houses, and universities.; British people were elegant, polite, and reserved. When I arrived here, I saw many ancient buildings and beautiful places from the airport to the universities, and I felt excited. I was even more surprised that the people here were very friendly. The staff warmly welcomed us and were very patient when we need help. However, after the welcome week, I felt a little bit lost when I began the formal study. Firstly, it was about studying some specialized education courses. My undergraduate degree was in English, with a focus on international business. I experienced some difficulties in understanding terms or phrases in the education field. However, I felt I could grasp the key concepts and followed the teachers in class after finishing the required reading materials, although finishing such a long reading list was quite difficult for me at that time. There was likely no discussion in terms of group discussion if I sat with other Chinese classmates who were unwilling to join the discussion and answer questions. Most of the teachers spoke clearly and had no accent, and I didn't require extra time to understand what they were talking about as long as I made good preparation before the class.

My primary social connection and interaction were other Chinese students from my programs and other school programs. I only talked with those non-Chinese students for academic purposes, including group discussions or group works, and asking questions in academic fields but lacking personal contact, such as hang out together or travel together. I have no non-Chinese friends at that time, as all my roommates were Chinese as well. Although I joined some university's societies and had dinner with some British students or students from other countries, they were all nice, but we had no contact after that. It seemed that they had their circle and own worlds, and it was difficult for me to enter. Besides, I also contact my parents every day to reassure them. Although it was my first time to leave home and study in another country, everything was curious to me; I was busy with my academic study and had no time to miss my family.

After submitting the dissertation, I could sit down to think about my personal experience throughout the year. One year was relatively a short time to complete postgraduate study,

many things had happened, and I felt there were many things I need to reflect on and learn. I have faced plenty of difficulties and seemed to overcome them. For instance, writing assignments were stressful, mostly when three of them were in the same week. I needed to read a lot and made adequate preparations. Although I started to write them two months before the deadline, I still felt worried about whether their quality could meet the teacher's standard.

Reflecting on my own experience during my postgraduate year, I didn't remember how I went through that process as I experienced many things, and everything happened so quickly.

Although I couldn't remember how I had grown academically or as a person myself, I had learned a lot and improved a lot from all aspects. Therefore, although I couldn't provide much help for the other international students, I wondered: What are the experiences and motivations of other taught international postgraduate students? Whether they experience the same difficulties as mine? What do they learn throughout the year? How do they adapt to the UK's local life and academic studies in such a short period? What factors affect their adjustment process? To sum up, my personal experience as a taught postgraduate international student in the UK motivated me to investigate further the adjustment experience of other taught postgraduate international students in humanities and social sciences.

### **1.3. Research backgrounds**

Understanding international students' context is significant for positioning the current study's questions on a broader range. After introducing international students on a global level, this research will then focus on the UK's situation.

#### **1.3.1. internationalization of higher education**

This study initially focuses on what factors motivate a full-time, postgraduate international student to study abroad in a British university and their subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological experiences. Therefore, issues related to the internationalization of higher education is critical to this research.

In terms of internationalization of higher education, according to Wit (1999), it was defined as 'an integration process of the international dimension into the teaching, research, and service function of the institution'(p. 21). Studying abroad is one of the typical activities of the internationalization of higher education and a widely discussed phenomenon in various aspects, such as economic growth, students' satisfaction, or language ability (Jackson, 2008). Similarly, as Altbach (1991) mentioned, higher education's internationalization is a significant issue in the globalized era, which will be a growing tendency for science, research, and scholarship. However, it is constructed and represented differently in different cultural

contexts and backgrounds (Leask, 2014). Several reasons motivate the students to receive education outside of their home countries, such as personal growth, career development, and intercultural ability improvement (Philip and Jane, 2007).

Internationalization of higher education initiatives exists in almost every country. Still, the developed countries, especially those large English-speaking countries, such as the UK and America, provide most services in recruiting international students (Philip and Jane, 2007). International students have grown in numbers and the range of their countries of origin (Turner, 2006).

The term 'international students' usually refers to individuals who have left their country of origin for study and are now pursuing tertiary education in a different country (OECD, 2012). This student must not be a citizen, permanent resident, refugee, or illegal immigrant of the host country (Institute of International Education, 2005). Based on this definition, the most updated statistics indicated that, in the 2018-2019 academic year, about 1,095,299 international students studied in the United States, the world's leading host nation (Duffin, 2020). Most of them were from Mainland China (34%), India (17.6%), South Korea (4.5%), Saudi Arabia (2.8%), and Canada (2.3%). Information from UKCISA (2019) suggested that, during the academic year 2017-2018, the number of students from abroad to study in the UK increased a lot during the past five years, from 436,600 to 485,645, coming from more than 50 different countries, most of them were from Mainland China (23.2%), India (4.3%), the United States (4.1%), Hong Kong, PRC (3.6%) and Malaysia (3.3%). Besides, based on the information from HESA (2019), among 2,383,970 students in higher education in the UK in 2017/18, 142,715 (6%) were from non-UK-EU countries, and 325,665 (13.7%) were from non-EU countries. China, India, and the United States were the top three non-EU sending countries. 16% of the entire first-degree undergraduate and 55% of the full-time taught postgraduate were non-UK students. These students account for 20% of the UK's total student population (HESA, 2019).

The internationalization of higher education has brought plenty of benefits worldwide, such as boosting international communication and the host countries' economies and increasing the host countries' teaching quality (Jackson, 2008, Chennamsetti and Bitu, 2019). For example, in 2018-2019, international students contributed \$45 billion to the US economy. According to the US Department of Commerce data, much of it was from tuition fees and living expenses Arielle (2020). According to a Higher Education Policy Institute report, during the academic year 2017-2018, international students added £20 billion to the British economy (Coughlan, 2018). As one of the leading destination countries recruiting overseas students, its history of international students coming to Britain for pursuing education could be traced back to the

medieval period (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013). In more recent times, around the end of World War II, over 6000 non-UK students were studying in the UK, the population then increased (Lee, 1998). However, as they introduce the policy of ‘full-cost fees’ for international students to concern about educational places for home students under the 1970’s financial circumstances, the number of non-British students reduced (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2013). In the 1980s, the British Council then worked with relevant authorities, and various scholarships were subsequently offered, which resulted in a gradually increasing number of international students. Moreover, thanks to the 1991 Education Act, the 1999 Prime Minister’s Initiative, and the 2006 Prime Minister’s Initiative program, the UK international higher education development was enhanced under such circumstances.

A research carried out by Chow and Bhandari (2010) in Asia (Hong Kong and Thailand), Africa (South Africa and Nigeria), and Europe (Turkey and Germany) found that students who have a plan to pursue overseas study are more likely to choose the United States and the United Kingdom as their top two destination countries. This finding reveals some unique characteristics of the UK education system that continued to attract the students to study here. For instance, a study conducted by Wang (2018) suggested that the excellent reputation and high quality of British education attracted Chinese students to pursue further education in the UK.

Therefore, as a growing number of internationalized universities in the UK and rather intensive international student mobility, understanding how the overseas study experience affect their adjustment process is significant. This study will provide in-depth knowledge of the international students’ experiences, better understand their lives, improve the resources, or offer valuable services to the international students to achieve a win-win result in the internationalization of higher education.

### **1.3.2. Internationalising higher education in the UK**

Over the last decade, a growing number of students have chosen to travel abroad for their further education (Rosenthal et al., 2010, Xiong and Zhou, 2018, Sinanan and Gomes, 2020). Although they travel to some countries, such as France, Canada, and the United States, the UK became one of the most popular destination for pursuing higher education thanks to its academic reputation and the widespread use of the English language (Hobsons, 2016, Wang, 2018, Yu and Moskal, 2019).

In the academic year 2014-2015, the total number of taught postgraduate international students were about 155,970 (see figure 1.1), by the year of 2019, the number had risen to nearly 170,785, increasing approximately 9.5% since 2014. Therefore, the taught

postgraduates became the largest student group in the UK, as shown in Figure 1.1 (HESA, 2019).

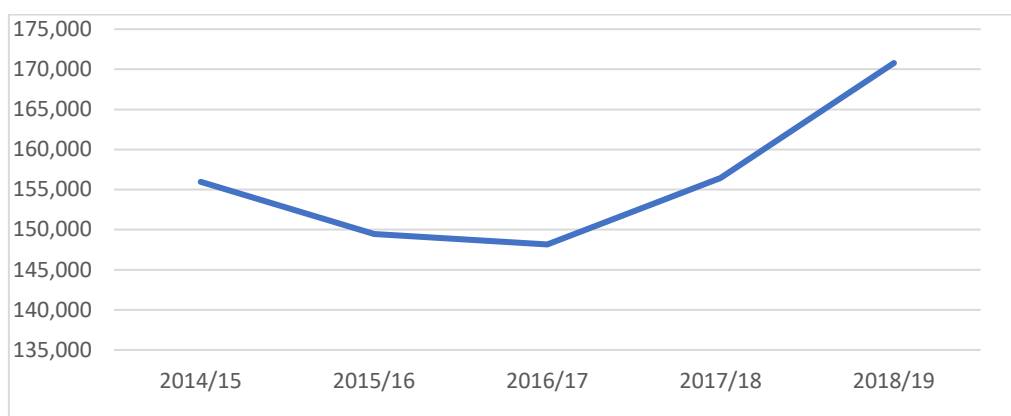


Figure 1.1 Number of international taught postgraduate students in the UK

Statistical data from the academic year 2018-2019 finds that in the UK alone, over 485,645 international students entered into undergraduate and postgraduate studies, contributing to almost 81% full-time taught postgraduate students (HESA, 2020). Additionally, according to UKCISA (2019), several students who study in MA degree programs such as Education, Languages, Social Studies, or Medias account for most.

It also reveals that there are some general reasons for choosing the UK higher education. For example, they are receiving a world-class education, joining a friendly international community, opening doors to a dream career, and being innovative (UKCISA, 2019). The arrival of those international students is crucial to the UK. They significantly contribute to promoting cultural diversity either in the classrooms or on campus, the academic environment enriched, and the educational value is broadening (Coughlan, 2011, Araujo, 2011, Xiong and Zhou, 2018). Also, international students' recruitment has become an essential part of the institutional income and national economic interest (Zha, 2003, Taušová et al., 2019).

Although universities in Britain have long been multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, with scholars from all over the world (Turner, 2006, Huang and Turner, 2018, Yu and Moskal, 2019), a shred of growing evidence found that international students could assist the local students and academic staffs in expanding their horizon (O'Reilly et al., 2013, Wang, 2012, Xiong and Zhou, 2018, Chien, 2020). Moreover, some literature also suggests that there are various positive learning experiences among those international students studying in the UK, for instance, developing a global social network with students worldwide, improving their language and critical thinking skills (Lillyman and Bennett, 2014).

However, despite such promising outcomes, there is also a lot of literature reporting the disadvantages and difficulties international students (Bird, 2017). For instance, the increase of international student numbers changed the postgraduate students' distribution and resulted in a larger classroom size (Tight, 2004, Finn et al., 2020). The large class size has identifying a range of both opportunities and challenges, levels of diversity among students and staff has a positive effect on the sociocultural experiences (Cowley and Hyams–Ssekasi, 2018), and a more recent study found that international students' feeling of belongings to the school community improved with large and diverse classrooms (Schachner et al., 2019). Besides, with a continuous increase of international students, the UK higher education institutions also encountered problems such as shortage of appropriate or adequate help and lack of learning resources (Gill, 2007, Wang, 2018). Moreover, in terms of adjustment difficulties, such as understanding plagiarism (Wang and Shan, 2006, Fatemi and Salto, 2020), adapt to different learning style (Bastien et al., 2018), language issues (Wang, 2018, Finn et al., 2020), adjusting to local culture (Coles and Swami, 2012), isolation and loneliness (Hirai et al., 2015), were also mentioned by many students. Therefore, it is apparent that there is a need to understand better cultural and educational differences within the UK higher education (Seo and Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).

This study was conducted in a British university in the North part of England. It is one of the UK's largest Higher Education Institutions, with over 21,600 students from more than 120 countries, with a renowned international reputation. It seems that international students' recruitment and increasing knowledge and understanding of international students play a significant role in the focus university. Thus, asking questions such as what their motivations to study abroad are, what their life and adjustment look like, and what the university could do to help them achieve their goals will influence the international students' welfare and the university's performance in recruiting providing services for international students.

Additionally, international students might also impact the local culture, values, and lifestyles despite the economic contributions. Therefore, how international students adjust to the local environment might also reveal how they generally adapt to that particular region.

#### **1.4. Research aims**

Motivations for studying abroad, academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustments are the main sections and research interests in the current project. A variety of factors related to international students' motivations to pursue overseas study in general and the UK, in particular, are firstly investigated via a semi-structured interview and questionnaire survey, together with their early-stage adjustment experience in three domains (academic,

sociocultural, and psychological). The second and third stages of academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment are then explored and discussed. Finally, the overall adjustment and the U-curve hypothesis, which begins with an initial optimistic experience with high expectation and then develop into a crisis, anxiety, and frustration, and then resulting in integration and usually used to describe the culture of adjustment of international students (see section 2.3.3.) are examined and discussed to find whether it still applies to and could explain the research findings in the current research.

Except for personal rationale, which mentions in the previous section (1.2), other reasons for choosing this research area is that international students are a significant and unique population in the current higher education system (King and Sondhi, 2018). Although they are the minority in the British higher education system (UKCISA, 2019), international students account for a unique world communication and development status. They bring benefits to the host countries and their home countries (Gündüz and Alakbarov, 2019). Thus, international students' motivations to study overseas and its subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustments should be investigated. It will be vital both to students and the universities who host them to provide adequate help to those who could not successfully adjust to their academic studies and lives.

This research described their experiences in a fixed university in the North part of the UK to identify those factors that international students report as promoting or limiting their academic success and facilitating or hindering their socialization within the local environment and host community.

Therefore, this empirical research aims to enhance the understanding of international students' adjustment experiences in the UK from insider perspectives in academic, sociocultural, and psychological domains. The study was designed to investigate the following issues under international students' experiences:

- To explore international students' initial motivations to study abroad and subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment experiences in the host environment.
- To discover international students' difficulties and investigate how they are coping with problems in three domains.
- To test the U-curve hypothesis for three domains to identify variations across academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment.

In order to achieve these aims, some research questions are formulated and presented (see Chapter 2, section 2.5).



## 1.5. Significance of the study

This study focused on international postgraduate international students' motivations for study abroad and their subsequent adjustment experiences. The findings will contribute to understanding international students' adjustment process in a British university and contribute to research on intercultural transitions. The research approaches could be adopted to studies that pay attention to international students' adjustment experience in the UK or other English-speaking countries. The findings could be used to make policies and as guidelines to improve international students' support services.

## 1.6. Organization of the thesis

This section presents the structure of the thesis, which shows in figure 1.2. This thesis is divided into ten chapters, from the introduction to the conclusion. The following contents are the summarises of all branches.

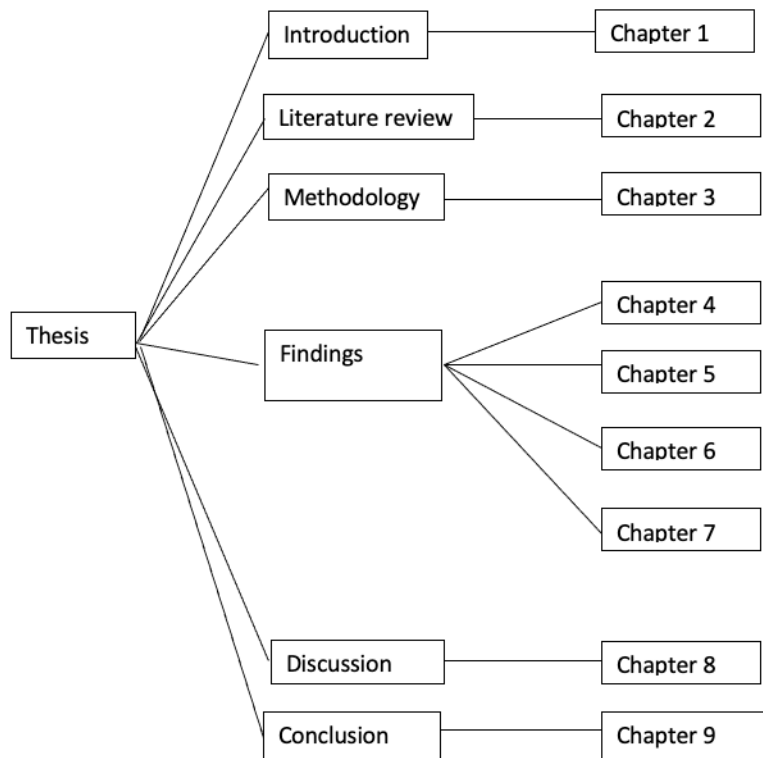


Figure 1.2 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1, The Introduction, provides an overview of the current research and the justification for conducting this study. To address the study's background, it introduced several relevant literatures on the internationalization of higher education globally and in the UK. The research aims and their significance are then presented, followed by the structure of the whole thesis.

Chapter 2, The literature review includes four main sections: a) motivations for studying abroad; b) adjustment of international students; c) empirical research on academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment; d) Contributory factors for international students' adjustment. The first section talks about backgrounds, theoretical models and theories, and empirical research on motivations to study abroad. The second section focuses on several potential theoretical frameworks, such as acculturation (Cuéllar et al., 1980), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), and the U-curve hypothesis (Lysgaard, 1955). The justification of introducing the U-curve hypothesis in this study is also reviewed in this section. The third section discusses some empirical research on three adjustment domains (academic, sociocultural, and psychological) to have a deeper understanding of international students' transitional experience. The last section in this chapter provides several influential factors for their adjustment, including academic difficulties, English language ability, social contact, and social support.

Chapter 3, The methodology, comprises eight sections: research design, research concepts (ontology, epistemology, and methodology), mixed methods research, research population and sampling strategy, data collection, pilot study, data analysis, and plans to avoid potential research difficulties, and limitations. The research design section outlines the overall research design and explains why this study adopted a longitudinal, mixed methods research design. The procedural sections, such as data collection, participant recruitment, pilot study, and data analysis, present the research process.

The pilot study conducted before the main streams helped prevent the potential challenges and facilitated the whole progress. Participants in questionnaire surveys were recruited through a convenience sampling strategy, whereas the interviewees were recruited based on the maximum variation sampling strategy. Both interviews and questionnaire surveys were carried out in three stages, i.e., at the beginning of the program (October 2018), five months into the program (February 2019), and at the end of their teaching period (June 2019). After data collection, Thematic Analysis and SPSS Software were employed as analysis approaches for interviews and questionnaire surveys. This chapter also includes ethical considerations and the validity and reliability of the research.

Chapters 4-7, The findings chapters provide qualitative and quantitative results focusing on students' motivations to study abroad, their academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment, respectively. These chapters contain rich and original opinions from the international students from three stages in three domains and reveal why they choose to study overseas. Besides, international students' academic and sociocultural difficulties were also presented, such as critical thinking ability, academic writing, English language ability, or

lacking interaction with the locals, followed by their coping strategies in dealing with these issues. Moreover, in Chapter 7, international students of this study have reflected on their overall adjustment experience in the UK and made comparisons across three stages in each domain (academic, sociocultural, and psychological).

Chapter 8 discusses comparisons between the findings in the current research and previous empirical research on international students, indicating the empirical contributions and connections among the themes from the results. These findings offer an opportunity to understand international students' motivations to study in the UK through Push-Pull models' lens and test the applicability of the U-curve hypothesis in academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment among international students nowadays.

Chapter 9, The conclusion presents a summary of the key findings, follows by an overall conclusion of the thesis. It offers theoretical contributions as well as the implications of the research. Besides, by realizing the limitations of this research, several recommendations for future studies are given.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

As far as international students are concerned, studying abroad is an unforgettable experience. Their motivations for overseas study and the expectations about studying abroad might be influenced by their adjustment to the host country. In this chapter, backgrounds, theoretical model and empirical research regarding motivations for studying abroad are reviewed (section 2.1.) at first, following by the key concepts (2.2.) and theoretical models (2.3.) of adjustment, empirical research on academic (2.4.), sociocultural and psychological experiences (2.5). Then, contributory factors of adjustment will be discussed (2.6), following by the present of research questions (2.7) and a summary (2.8).

### **2.1. Motivations for studying abroad**

Nowadays, study abroad has continued to increase in popularity within the higher education sector, and the motivations for pursue overseas education are complicated and correlative (Hackney et al., 2014). In order to fully understand these issues, relevant fields and discussions need to be taken into consideration. Therefore, in this section, the background for reviewing motivations for study abroad, related empirical research and a fundamental framework are presented to have a better understanding of international students' motivations and decisions for an overseas education.

#### **2.1.1. The background of reviewing motivations for studying abroad**

Participation in study abroad has been growing rapidly during recent years (Salyers et al., 2015). In such a highly competitive environment of higher education, students are encountered with a variety of options and have to undertake complex decisions to make the correct decision. They have become more critical, demanding, and analytical while choosing their destinations (Nafari et al., 2017). The study abroad decision is deemed as one of the most important and costly measures those students will ever take (Curtis and Ledgerwood, 2018). The decision is time-consuming, with various possibilities and alternatives and has high personal preference (Rezaei, 2016). Although the international students spend plenty of time to find information regarding the host country, they find the process quite risky and complex (Nafari et al., 2017).

The decision making in international higher education is an area of growing research interests and many literatures have focused on the continuous process, their choices and motivations (Movassaghi et al., 2014, Curtis and Ledgerwood, 2018, Nafari et al., 2017). The study abroad decision process including a number of stages (Nafari et al., 2017), which begins with the motivations to study abroad and ends with the selection of desired university (Roberts et

al., 2010), push and pull factors are also considered in this process (Lee, 2017). Previous literature suggested that the decision making process including at least three distinct stages (Nafari et al., 2017): the first stage concerns the decision whether to study abroad or not, the factors (e.g. lack of capacity and opportunities in their home countries, lower educational quality, or employer preference for overseas education) related to students' home country are significant at this time. The second stage involves the selection of a host country, the factors (e.g., the reputation of the country or the university, international recognition of qualification, teaching quality and locational factors, or opportunity to improve their language skills) within the host country make it more attractive compared to the other countries. In terms of the third stage, it regarding the selection of a specific university.

In addition, taking studying abroad experiences into consideration, it is becoming increasingly clear that a study abroad experience can offer a wide range of benefits for participants (Anderson and Lawton, 2015) and researchers have identified a variety of reasons and motivations for doing so (Daly, 2011, Wehbi, 2009). Firstly, students returning from study abroad frequently describe their experiences as 'life-changing' and 'transformative', and often report to be improved both academically and cognitively (Cisneros-Donahue et al., 2012) along with their intercultural awareness, openness to diversity, and personal growth (Mapp, 2012, Gilin and Young, 2009). It prepares the students to become specialist in the modern globalized world (Miller-Perrin and Thompson, 2014) and help the students to view events from a world perspective (Che et al., 2009). The study abroad experience translates into global awareness and intercultural competence and can enhance students' learning opportunities, improve personal skills and foster personal growth (Orahod et al., 2004). In addition, research has shown that immersion in the target culture is essential to the students' second language learning, especially in their oral production ability (Collentine, 2004, Isabelli-Garcia, 2006), and the amount of contact with members of the host community is of great value to the acquisition of sociocultural as well as sociolinguistic knowledge (Lafford, 2004). According to previous studies, international students' decisions of choosing destination countries for their overseas studies is often based on their personal needs, situations, and factors which related to academic requirements, educational benefits, and the living environment of the host country (Chen, 2007, Maringe and Carter, 2007, Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

### **2.1.2. Definition of international students**

Traditionally, researchers have described international students as an individual who travel to a foreign country specifically for study, with a temporary student visa (Institute of

International Education, 2005). The presence of international students add to the multiculturalism and diversity of the general student population and reinforces a global perspective and exchange of ideas (Smith, 2016). The concept of international students varies across countries in accordance with their own national education system. For instance, in Australia, international students are defined as individuals studying onshore with a student visa, excluding students on Australian-funded scholarships or sponsorship or students undertaking study while in possession of other temporary visas. As New Zealand citizens do not require a visa to study in Australia, therefore, they are not classed as international students (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). Some of the research defined the term based on the special research aim or needs. According to Andrade (2006), this term is defined as the students who enrolled in the institutions of higher education who are non-native English speakers. However, as the UK is not one of the European Union members anymore, in this study, the term 'international student' refers to the one who is not a permanent resident and without British citizenship, including students from European Union, such as France, Greece and Germany.

### **2.1.3. Empirical research on motivations for study abroad**

International students' motives for seeking education in another country are often influenced by both home and host countries (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, Arthur, 2017). In the following literature review, empirical research on motivations for study abroad is discussed from different aspects, including political, personal, educational, cultural, and environmental, so as to have a comprehensive understanding of the related issues.

#### ***Personal factors***

Taking personal reasons into consideration, it includes several aspects which originate from individual internal needs or desires and motivate international students pursue overseas education directly or indirectly. In general, overseas experiences is often marketed as a way to expand international and cross-cultural perspectives (Orahod et al., 2004, Curtis and Ledgerwood, 2018), increasing interpersonal skills (Henthorne et al., 2001, Raczkoski et al., 2018), experiencing different academic, social and cultural challenge (Ching et al., 2017), and enhancing students' understanding of their own culture. Factors, such as personal growth, self-awareness, professional development (Kitsantas, 2004, Curtis and Ledgerwood, 2018), and application of what they have learned also motivate students to study abroad (Ingraham and Peterson, 2004, Gong et al., 2020). Moreover, personal or general academic goals, such as the improvement of their language proficiency (Young, 2017, Wang, 2018) or receiving a

multicultural education were also found to be elements which drive them for overseas education (Brewer, 1983, Gündüz and Alakbarov, 2019).

Among all these factors, it can be argued that international experiences and qualifications are an important mechanism for students to build personal capital (Brown and Hesketh, 2004, Gong et al., 2020) in order to gain a positional advantage over their peers (UK Higher Education International Unit, 2015). However, some other studies found that students always tend to pay more attention to the personal reasons than strategic motivations while deciding to study abroad. According to Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) and Taušová et al. (2019), students ranked personal growth far above career or academic relevance. Similarly, a project carried out among students in the Erasmus exchange programme also found that their choice for studying abroad resulted largely from the desire for self-development (Lesjak et al., 2015). Additionally, Raczkoski et al. (2018) discovered that the most significant benefit perceived from studying abroad was that it would provide a different culture and language, followed by the chance to see whether they would like to live and work overseas. Furthermore, after interviewing UK students who studied abroad, they found that the majority of the participants in their sample only had vague career and migration plans and didn't think a lot about whether their decisions of studying abroad would affect their career (Brooks et al., 2012, Wu and Wilkes, 2017).

Additionally, family expectations and parental encouragement could substantially increase students' desire to pursue overseas education (Davey, 2005, Bahna, 2017). Finances, support, and recommendations from parents or other family members as well as the previous overseas study experiences from their friends or relatives were also examined as important motivators (Gatfield and Chen, 2006, Bahna, 2017). A study of students from Thai families found that parental support emotionally and morally along with funds, information, and anticipation (Davey, 2005). For instance, relatives or friends who had studied in Australia tended to recommend Chinese students to study abroad in Australia (Mazzarol et al., 2001, Anderson and Guan, 2017). Moreover, suggestions from non-family, such as teachers or professors (Chen, 2007, Raczkoski et al., 2018), or information received via 'word of mouth' were also discovered to be relevant (Gatfield and Chen, 2006).

Moreover, social activities, such as contacts with professionals or local friends (Davey, 2005, Sinanan and Gomes, 2020) or intention to travel (Zeszotarski, 2003, Rita et al., 2018) were also discovered as the motivations to study abroad. As the study abroad experience is commonly thought to be the greatest sources for language use and social interaction (Dewey et al., 2013, Taušová et al., 2019). They are able to interact with others by participating in clubs, part-time jobs, community service, social events (Whitworth, 2006, Gündüz and

Alakbarov, 2019). A study of students in Germany found that learners who participated in a variety of community interactions, for instance, playing on football teams or doing internships, during studying abroad, demonstrated more linguistic development in reading and writing than the others (Fraser, 2002, Wilson et al., 2019). Similarly, Whitworth (2006) found that joining in school clubs, sports, and social activities outside of the classroom contributed to linguistics improvement in French.

### ***Educational factors***

Education factors, such as educational accessibility and quality might affect international students' decisions to study abroad. For students, it appears that an international educational experience is one where people from different cultural backgrounds exchange knowledge and understandings, and are taught by a team of international experts (Maringe and Carter, 2007, Raczkoski et al., 2018). For instance, Chinese students choose to study abroad because they take acceptability into account and recognition of UK higher education as a tremendous benefit for their long-term investment (Wang, 2018). As far as India students are concerned, two driving factors for international education are the desire to understand western culture and to obtain an education better than that offered locally (Mazzarol et al., 2001, Chennamsetti and Bitra, 2019). Besides, the limited opportunities or accessibility for university education and inadequate higher education capacity in a home country may push the student pursue education overseas (Chen and Zimitat, 2006, Lee, 2017). Additionally, the complex application process in American university could pull some African students to study in the UK (Maringe and Carter, 2007). No admission requirements for Graduate Record Examination and Graduate Management Admission Test also attract some students to study in the UK (Gatfield and Chen, 2006, Massoud and Ayo, 2018).

Reputation, quality, and international qualifications also affect students' intentions to study abroad (Mazzarol et al., 2001, Davey, 2005, Yu and Moskal, 2019). The United Kingdom and the United States are classified as the country with high educational quality by some Chinese students (Mazzarol et al., 2001, Yu and Moskal, 2019). Thanks to its academic reputation and the widespread use of the English language, the UK became one of the most popular destinations for pursuing higher education. Universities in Britain have long been multi-cultural, multi-ethnic communities with scholars from a wide range of overseas nations (Turner, 2006, Huang and Turner, 2018). International students have grown not only in numbers but also in the range of their countries of origin (Turner, 2006, Huang and Turner, 2018). Moreover, a study carried out by Chen and Zimitat (2006) discovered better future visions and the potential for improved job prospects while returning home also drive students to study overseas. Furthermore, differences in learning approach (Biggs, 1995), such as the



flexibility in learning environment (Janjua et al., 2011, Bailey, 2006) and high quality of career training in developed countries also encourage students to study there (Sverko, 2005, Raczkoski et al., 2018).

### ***Cultural factors***

One of the most common benefit commonly identified for studying abroad is the students' exposure to different social and cultural environments (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019). Living in another culture changes one's stereotypes of other nationalities (Stangor et al., 1994, Xie et al., 2020) and it presents one with an alternative view of the world (Gündüz and Alakbarov, 2019). These culture related reasons always come from one's internal desire and push the students to have more interaction with people from different backgrounds or another country (Hoof and Verbeeten, 2005, Sinanan and Gomes, 2020). Study abroad has been found to foster cultural understanding and intercultural competence (Kubota, 2016), especially a short-term program, generally could increase students' intercultural sensibility (Jackson, 2008), which is crucial to enabling people to live and work with others from different cultural backgrounds (Landis and Bhagat, 1996). As our work place and society become more diverse, and as globalization of business intensifies, an individual's sensitivity to cultural differences combined with an ability to adapt his or her behaviour to those differences will become increasingly valuable (Anderson et al., 2006, Xiong and Zhou, 2018). Therefore, experiencing multicultural environments through cultural immersion would also be a significant motivator to study abroad (Kitsantas, 2004, Maringe and Carter, 2007, Davey, 2005, Curtis and Ledgerwood, 2018). Besides, interests in globalization, international contacts and achieving educational goals that enhance the skills essential for operating effectively in a complex global environment, have been found to be an important reason or factor for students in business studies to study abroad (Earnest, 2003, Gillespie, 2002, Orahod et al., 2004, Liu et al., 2018). Furthermore, understanding a host country and culture from a new perspective could be another consideration for international students (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, Raczkoski et al., 2018).

### ***Environmental factors***

The situation of the country of origin, namely economic decline or stagnation, political instability, and lack of capacity of local universities are the main factors that influence students to search for a university abroad (Maringe and Carter, 2007, McMahon, 1992, Lee, 2017). Cost, which includes not only tuition fees, living costs or travel, but also social costs such as insecurity, crime and racial discrimination, is also considered (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, Wiers-Jenssen, 2018). The geographic proximity between the origin and the destination country may also be a factor, as a closer distance between home and destination countries

may also facilitate the students' mobility (Lam et al., 2011). Additionally, a study of Chinese students in Canada found that a relatively safe environment was significantly and positively contribute to the choice of Canada as the destination to study, and also, a safe and low crime environment was contribute to Chinese students to consider Australia as a study destination (Mazzarol et al., 2001). Moreover, the students perception of the education environment, the physical conditions of the host country and university, the overall lifestyle (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, King and Sondhi, 2017), as well as the touristic and cultural attractions of the country, are also relevant (Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe, 2008, Rita et al., 2018).

### ***Informational factors***

The available information on destination country is also a relevant factor that encourage international students pursue overseas studies (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002, Amani and Kim, 2017). It depends not only on the amount of information available but also on how easily the student is able to find that information (Oliveira and Soares, 2016). While choosing a destination university, students will gather as much as possible information on universities and the courses, and the accurate and trustable information would reduce the risk involved in deciding the overseas universities (Mortimer, 1997, Bahna, 2017). Previous studies categorised the information sources according to three different types, including internal sources, which controlled by the institution, interpersonal sources as well as external sources (Eder et al., 2010, Briggs and Wilson, 2007). Some signal that the complexity of information available is daunting and can deter applications (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). Overloaded information and too much choice can be a problem for the student, even when the choice is very important to them (Schwartz, 2000, Amani and Kim, 2017). Except from identifying the type of information sources used by the students, it is also important to understand whether the provided information is responding to their needs (Oliveira and Soares, 2016). The lack of adequate reply or lack of information may even be perceived as a negative characteristic of the welcoming university (Mortimer, 1997).

### ***Touristic factors***

Although tourism is not the international students' primary motivation while making decision to study abroad, and those who travel during their study usually defined as tourists (Stone and Petrick, 2013). However, a variety of the study abroad motivators are quite similar to touristic motivations. Among them, the most mentioned factors for pursuing overseas studies were have a brand-new experiences (Juvan and Lesjak, 2011, Rita et al., 2018), to live in and learn about a completely different culture (Van Hoof, 2006, Amani and Kim, 2017), provide them with a good chance to travel (Sanchez et al., 2006, Marques et al., 2018), a desire to go somewhere different and speaking another language in daily lives (Doyle et al., 2010, Chien,

2020). In addition, the factors which attract the tourists were also found to be the motivation for international students to pursue overseas studies (Hamm and Robertson, 2010, Rita et al., 2018).

A large number of top ranked universities around the world are found in English speaking countries such as the UK, US, Australia, etc (Abubakar et al., 2014, Wilson et al., 2019). Local and regional governments are becoming more and more active to attract the international students leaving home, travelling and experience new cultures (Blight, 1995, Taušová et al., 2019). The benefits and results of studying abroad have been researched, but it is often not very clear whether it is due to travel and to what degree learning taking place as a result of travel (Stone and Petrick, 2013). Therefore, this study focuses on motivations to study its subsequent effects to their learning outcomes, and whether the tourism issues play a significant role in the decision-making process.

#### **2.1.4. Theoretical models and theories of motivations to study abroad**

The ‘push-pull’ model and the model of expectancy-value are applied to this study so as to interpret international students’ motivations to study abroad. In general, theories related to consumer behaviour and the ‘push-pull’ model are usually adopted to explain issues which are associated with internationalization of higher and international student mobility. Therefore, in this section, these theoretical models are reviewed accompanied with some empirical studies.

##### ***The ‘push-pull’ model***

The ‘push-pull’ model was originally used by Lee (1966) in the theory of migration, in order to explain the factors affecting the migration of people. In later years, this model was introduced to understand and examine the mobility of students across borders and their motivations to study abroad (Maringe and Carter, 2007, McMahon, 1992). This model suggests that there are various factors which would ‘push’ and ‘pull’ international students to leave their home country and study abroad (Chen, 2007). Among them, the ‘push’ factors initiate the student’s decision to study overseas, these motivators tend to be economic or political and appear to play a more significant role in choice of country (Maringe and Carter, 2007), for instance, lack of capacity and opportunities in their home countries, lower educational quality, or employer preference for overseas educations, whereas the ‘pull’ factors operate in the host country to attract students to that particular country rather than other countries, for example, the reputation of the country or the university, international recognition of qualification, teaching quality and locational factors, opportunity to experience

a different culture, or opportunity to improve their language skills (Wilkins et al., 2012). This different ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors usually result in a decision for an overseas education. For instance, research by Maringe and Carter (2007) found that the most significant ‘push’ factors were economic, political and lack of local capacity within countries of origin, and local labour market tendencies seems to favour those with UK higher education qualifications. The study also revealed that the perceived excellent teaching and learning environment in the UK higher education is viewed as a lifetime investment and opportunity to study there. Besides, increasing knowledge and understanding of the Western culture, followed by the consideration of a better quality of an overseas education, played the most important role to pull Chinese students to study abroad (Mazzarol et al., 2001). Furthermore, a safe environment, employment opportunities and high-quality courses ‘pulled’ international students to study in Australia (Baker et al., 1996). The choice of the US as a place of study is greater when a resident population of friends or relatives exists, but lower due to the geographic proximity of Australia and its safe environment (Kemp et al., 1998). Using such findings to understand the international students’ motivation enables the university to better satisfy students’ needs and expectations. Although the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ model is valuable as an explanatory mechanism, it has limitations. Both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors are external factors which influence their behaviours and options, but much depends on the personal characteristics of the students (Li and Bray, 2007). However, as the push-pull model has most often been adopted to examine students who selected English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia as their destinations (Lee, 2017), which is similar to the current research context. Besides, this study conducted at north part of England in a specific department, less is known regarding the unique push-pull factors of international students engaging in programmes from humanities and social sciences. Considering that increasingly more students are now choosing programmes such as language, education, social studies and media (UKCISA, 2019), it seems prudent to explore the distinct push-pull factors of this growing group of international students.

### ***The expectancy-value model***

As a grounded theory in the social cognitive perspectives, the expectancy-value provide better understanding of students’ choice, persistence and performance in education (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). The expectancy-value model was firstly developed by (Atkinson, 1957) in order to understand various achievement-related choices (Wigfield et al., 2009). According to Wigfield and Eccles (2000), the main outcome component within the expectancy model is achievement-related choice and performance, to predict expectations for success and previous achievement-related tasks. In other words, when students think they can do something, they

are more inclined to do so (Barron and Hulleman, 2014). Similarly, a study conducted by Raczkoski et al. (2018) focusing on students' motivation to study abroad suggested that international students were more likely to be involved in studying abroad experience if they perceived they could be successful, have high expectations for the program or had positive previous overseas experiences. Additionally, Isaac et al. (2001) also found individuals felt motivated at the time when 'the personal expenditure of effort will result in an acceptable level of performance, the performance level achieved will result in a specific outcome for the person, and the outcome attained is personally valued' (p.215). The model revealed that individual and contextual factors, such as personal or family backgrounds, previous experiences, or influence from teachers or friends, shaped their expectancy and value over time (Barron and Hulleman, 2014). Although both expectancies and values are positively correlated with a variety of adaptive achievement outcome, expectancy is more predictive of performance outcomes, whereas value is more predictive of continued interest and subsequent course enrolment outcomes (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000). Despite the significant effects of the expectancy and value, the growing body of empirical research found the neglect or ignore of students' motivation while investigating their adjustment process (Barron and Hulleman, 2014, Raczkoski et al., 2018). Therefore, as motivation is determined by the expectation that the action will result in an incentive, and people are more motivated to take actions that they believed will result in desirable outcomes (Tamir et al., 2014), the influence of their previous experience or the people around, and students' motivations should be further investigated in order to have a comprehensive view of their adjustment process.

To sum up, empirical research on motivations for study abroad (section 2.1.3) including personal, educational, cultural, environmental, informational, and touristic factors could be divided into two categories according to the push-pull model. The push factors which initiate international students' decision to study abroad are educational (inadequate higher education capacity) and environmental (economic decline or stagnation and political instability), whereas pull factors are related to personal (expand international and cross-cultural perspective), educational (academic reputation in the host country), informational (the available information on destination country) and touristic (travel). In terms of the expectancy-value, the empirical research also indicates that the adequate information gathering from the universities also motivated the students to pursue overseas study.

## **2.2. Key concepts of adjustment**

In this section, some key concepts that are used throughout the thesis will be defined and reviewed, including adjustment of international student, academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment.

### **2.2.1. Adjustment of international students**

The awareness that international students facing transition and adjustment difficulties is not new. In the 1960s, some scholars were focusing on the social relations, thinking as well as ideas of international students (Selltiz et al., 1963). In order to identify the adjustment difficulties of international students, many different methods come up. However, although the adjustment issue has been written by various authors, there is no common definition of it (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019) and it is actually a complicated concept with a dynamic processes which indicate a good collocation to the individual and the environment (Ramsay et al., 2007)

Researchers of adjustment have seen it as an active process of dealing with change rather than a noxious event (Ward et al., 2001). Some recent studies mention that the adjustment experiences are affected by a number of cross-cultural factors, such as the length of stay in the UK as well as the accommodation issues (Schartner, 2016) and some researchers found that international students' adjustment was different in accordance with their home country and host country (Akhtar and Kröner-Herwig, 2015). After arriving in a foreign country, international students may need to adjust to life and cultural differences, which may be related to both academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment. Therefore, in this section, key concepts which related to this research, theoretical models of adjustment as well as empirical research will be reviewed.

### **2.2.2. Academic adjustment**

Being a student is a very demanding task which requires adjustment to brand new educational experiences. As one of the main domains of the sociocultural adjustment (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006), academic adjustment is defined here as adjustment to the demands of academic life including teaching approaches and learning at the host university (Ballard, 1987), and it concerns the fit between students and the academic environment (Ramsay et al., 2006) which might examine issues such as learning approaches, study habits, educational background, culture as well as language proficiency. Also, motivation to learn, a clear sense of purpose taking action to meet academic demands as well as general satisfaction with the academic environment are also vital elements of academic adjustment (Baker and Siryk, 1984). Besides,

in a more recent study conducted by Young and Schartner (2014), described academic adjustment as the ability to adjust to the university at host country, which including the way of teaching and learning.

In terms of international students, most of them would agree that one of their optimal goals for studying abroad is to gain an education that will allow them to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others (Curtis and Ledgerwood, 2018). Therefore, education, to a degree, facilitate and boosts the process of their adjustment. As academic adjustment is positively related with learning and academic performance (Baker and Siryk, 1999), an increasing number of studies (Wang, 2018, van Rooij et al., 2018, Alshafi and Shin, 2017) are focusing on investigating the factors that affect academic adjustment abroad including English language ability, different teaching and learning approaches, critical thinking ability and academic writing. For example, a research focused on the Indian international students found that one of the main difficulties encountered by them was to adjust to a complete new academic system in the host country (Nayak and Venkatraman, 2010) and other studies also indicated that academic problems are often deemed as the major source of stress among these students (Park et al., 2017).

The major reason is that the culture of education differs from culture to culture, and country to country (Janjua et al., 2011). Some literature defines these kind of unfamiliar learning experiences as ‘learning shock’ (Griffiths et al., 2005) or ‘academic shock’ (Ryan, 2011), and those who pursue a postgraduate degree and who are lacking in familiarity with local learning and teaching methods would also experience ‘learning shock’, might undergo an additional adjustment from undergraduate level to a new level of study as well. (Luxon and Peelo, 2009).

A large number of literature has identified various factors which might influence a successful academic adjustment for the international students (Glass and Westmont, 2014), among them, language is considered to be one of the significant issue which can hindering a potentially smooth academic adjustment (Galloway and Jenkins, 2005). Difficulties in understanding the teachers and a lack of confidence in English proficiency may impede students’ participation in group discussions (Zhai, 2002). A research which focused on Malaysian international students in the UK also showed that adequate English ability played an essential role in accelerating adjustment in academic life. And for those with relative low English language ability encountered more challenges that the others (Swami et al., 2010).

Moreover, a study of Chinese International students in the UK found that English writing ability and interactions with students from other countries were both important in achieving academic success (Li et al., 2010).

Finally, a study carried out by Zhou and Todman (2009) found that sociocultural and psychological adaptation might influence international students' academic achievement, and vice versa. Therefore, while evaluating international students' adjustment, the academic adjustment could not be discussed alone, and it would be better to investigate sociocultural and psychological adjustment together.

Sociocultural and psychological adjustment are discussed as follows.

### **2.2.3. Sociocultural adjustment**

According to Ward et al. (2001), there are mainly two types of adjustment and adaptation outcome, sociocultural and psychological, which are influenced by a range of individual level variables and social variables. Unlike psychological adjustment which impacted by individual coping strategies (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019), sociocultural adjustment, which refers to a person's 'fit' in the host environment, and the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills in order to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment was related to learning a new culture, enhancing intergroup relations as well as changing cultural identities (Ward and Kennedy, 1999), and is best explained within a culture learning paradigm. It also refers to the ability to gain and interact on suitable social and cultural skills so as to match the host environment (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019), it is strongly affected by the behavioural and cognitive factors that are associated with effective performance during cross-cultural transition (Sam et al., 2006), such as the length of residence in the new culture, cultural knowledge, amount of interaction and identification with host nationals, language proficiency along with acculturation strategies (Searle and Ward, 1990, Ward and Searle, 1991), and predictably follows a learning curve with the rapid improvement over the first few months of cross-cultural transition and then a gradual 'levelling off' of newly acquired skills (Ward and Kennedy, 1999).

Previous research found that success in sociocultural adjustment is considered to be a function of a number of sociodemographic variables, for instance, education level, academic performance, prior cross-cultural experience, host language proficiency and family income (Ataca and Berry, 2002, Swami, 2009). Besides, perceived cultural distance between the host country and their home country has also been reliably associated with sociocultural adjustment, which indicate that a larger perceived distance results in greater difficulties for the student (Galchenko and van de Vijver, 2007). Researchers have particular stressed the positive effect of social interaction with host nationals on adjustment, it not only allowing international students to develop local networks, understand local cultures, and acquire necessary social skills (Li and Gasser, 2005), but also providing a less 'stressful' adjustment



experience (Carr et al., 2003). Similarly, a study carried out by Russell et al. (2010) confirmed that students experiencing a strong sense of connectedness display a lower level of cultural stress and higher level of positive effects while studying abroad. However, there is evidence that, under some circumstances, contact can be threatening and distressing (Greenland and Brown, 2005), and it has long been argued that whether stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination are reduced by interactions between groups (Allport, 1954). Moreover, international students experience a number of other social challenges or difficulties during the process of adjust to the host country (Yan, 2017). It is a relative challenging issue for these student to manage their own affairs in the host environment due to the lack of social support, such as the encouragement from family and friends as well as social networks established in the past (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019). A study conducted by Pedersen et al. (2017) indicates that this condition could be solved by positive social involvement in the host country, it also find that the interaction with the locals are especially essential to the sociocultural adjustment. Therefore, if the local students are not supportive enough or even neglect in helping them, the sociocultural adjustment of international students could be largely affected (Pedersen et al., 2017). The other aspects which affect international students' adjustment such as English language ability (see section 2.6.1), academic difficulties (section 2.6.2), social contact (section 2.6.3), and social support (section 2.6.4) will be discussed in further.

#### **2.2.4 Psychological adjustment**

Different from the sociocultural adjustment which concerns people's sense as to how well they can 'fit in' to the new environment, psychological adjustment is best understood from a stress and coping perspective (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006) and is customarily considered to be general feelings of well-being and emotional satisfaction the student comes to experience in the new culture (Searle and Ward, 1990, Cho and Yu, 2015). It is largely influenced by personality, social support and life change variables (Ward et al., 1998). Oberg (1960) referred to the strain of making new psychological adjustment as a sense of loss, confusion about one's role and feelings of anxiety. Similarly, according to Mesidor (2016), depression and anxiety are commonly experienced during the process. Moreover, self-efficacy and perceived social support from friends and significant others were significantly related to international students' positive psychological adjustment (Yusoff, 2012, Bender et al., 2019). A research carried by Yeoh and Terry (2013) , at the University of Tasmania showed that the students suffered a variety of psychological problems, including loneliness, anxiety as well as homesickness. Such distress could not only have impact on their overall psychological

wellbeing, but also affect the adjustment in other domains, such as academic or sociocultural. In addition, as a majority of the students usually have high expectations while pursuing overseas education, therefore, at the time they didn't meet their expectations some time, they would suffer psychological issues (Li et al., 2016). Moreover, a study carried out by Li et al. (2014) which focused on East Asian international students who studying in a Western university indicated that their psychological wellbeing were associated with stress and depression.

As international students encounter the instant life changes while entering to the new environment, issues related to psychological adjustment might be the most serious on among all the domains (Park et al., 2017). Among them, lacking social support or with limited support resulting in a negative psychological performance. For instance, previous research conducted by Bender et al. (2019) found that all types of social support have a positive impact on psychological adjustment, that is, international students who perceived more social support, felt more emotional support or more satisfied with the support provided by the others were those who reported relative better adjustment experience in psychological domain. The further details of the significance of social support will be reviewed later (see section 2.6.4.). As the majority of studies were focused on the sociocultural adjustment, there is a comparative lack of explicit research which pay attention to the adjustment from psychological perspectives (Coles and Swami, 2012), and it is still relatively uncommon for researchers to investigate all three adjustment in one single study (Jackson et al., 2013), thus, there is a need to investigate 'adjustment' from a holistic perspective.

### **2.3. Theoretical models of adjustment**

In this section, several theoretical models of adjustment will be reviewed, including acculturation, social identity theory and the U-curve hypothesis.

#### **2.3.1 Acculturation**

Early studies relevant to acculturation mainly generated from ethnic as well as cross-cultural psychology, among them, a number of literatures were focused on defining and evaluating acculturation (Cuéllar et al., 1980, Juang and Syed, 2019) and treated it as a state instead of a process. According to Olmeda (1979), there are three models of acculturation, including uni-dimensional, bi-dimensional and categorical. In terms of uni-dimensional, it related to the gradually give up identification of their original culture and tends to shift to the host culture. It regards the host and home culture as an opposite rather than coexisting. Whereas for the model of bi-dimensional, it is quite balanced among the groups such as sojourner, immigrants and refugees (Ramirez, 1984). Besides, a study conducted by Sam and Berry (2010)

suggested that acculturation occurs when groups of people from different cultures interact continuously and brings about behavioural and psychological changes to the individuals. With such continuous interactions, an acculturation process could be observed as a group level phenomenon (Yu et al., 2018).

The concept of acculturation has long been central to the understanding of international students adjustment (Juang and Syed, 2019) and the ways in which culturally diverse groups adjust to each other (Berry, 1984, Berry, 2003). It is also regarded as the process of intercultural adaptation (Zhou et al., 2008). On an individual level, acculturation refers to how individuals change and adapt as a result of long term, continuous exposure to a new culture (Ward and Geeraert, 2016). In this study, acculturation can be defined as the adjustment of a person or group living or experiencing a different culture. As intercultural adaptation mainly focused on two dimensions: sociocultural and psychological adjustments, with good stress-coping strategies and relevant cultural learning skills, the students could make a better transition or adjustment while pursue overseas studies (Galchenko and van de Vijver, 2007, Ward and Geeraert, 2016). In addition, it is noteworthy that the acculturation process is not same for all acculturating groups and host environments (Bhatia and Ram, 2001, Anderson and Guan, 2017). It might be more difficult and distress for international students, especially those from Asian countries to have successful acculturation in Western societies (Anderson and Guan, 2017), due to the fact that two cultures tend to contrast in some aspects, including cultural components (lifestyle, core values) and behavioural patterns (Yu et al., 2018, Szabó et al., 2020) Therefore, acculturation is a significant concept in this study to discover whether the international students' adjustment process is completely within a cultural inculcation or other possibility might be included.

### **2.3.2. Social identity theory**

Social identity theory emerged from social psychology (Tajfel, 1981), which pay attention to the cognitive parts of the adjustment process and considers how group membership influence the individual identity, especially in two aspects. Firstly, how social categorisation and social comparison are associated with self-esteem, in-group favouritism and out-group derogation (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The second one is the effects of specific cross-cultural diversity on group membership, perceptions and interactions (Brown et al., 1992). According to social identity theory, individuals define the sense of self identity regarding social categories or group memberships (Guan and So, 2016). The social aspects of our lives shape not only who we are, but also inform how we think and what we do (Haslam et al., 2009). Additionally, as it is formed and developed through social interactions, social identity is a product of

communicative behaviours (Scott et al., 1998, Zhang and Peltokorpi, 2015). Communicating with others enable the individuals to express their belongings to different groups, assess group image and reputation and use the acquired identity to lead their lives (Ashforth et al., 2008, Trepte and Loy, 2017).

Relevant study which consists of issues related to avoid or reduce uncertainty, needs the ability to interpret their own behaviours and that of others (Gudykunst and Hammer, 1988). It emphasize the importance of their attitudes towards the locals and the locals' attitudes towards them, as well as adequate knowledge of the host environment (Gudykunst, 1983, Fujita et al., 2018). In addition, it could result in the changes in sense of their identity and themselves, which were bult within the social interaction with locals (Zhou Y et al., 2008) and their perceptions and relations could change rapidly in terms of both in-group and out-groups (Deaux, 1996).

The cognitive (C) aspect of the social identity theory, the behavioural (B) analysis which provided by the culture learning approach and the affective (A) aspect in the stress and coping framework, together laid a foundation for a comprehensive model of cultural adaptation (Zhou et al., 2008). Previous research suggested that social identity serves as the foundation for linking individuals' group membership to concrete group-approved behaviour (Davis et al., 2019). More relevant to the current research, individuals who identify with a particular group value and emulate the group's distinguishing characteristics (Guan and So, 2016). Besides, social identity is a member's perception of how others see the group and its membership, which is an important source of self-esteem (Fujita et al., 2018). People are more likely to connect with successful groups when such affiliation is perceived to confer high status (Mangum and Block, 2018). Therefore, examining individual's interaction and relationships with others or their affiliations with particular social groups would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of international students' experiences, attitudes and behaviours.

### **2.3.3. The U-curve hypothesis**

The U-curve hypothesis is usually introduced to describe the culture adjustment of international students. It begins with a student's initial optimistic experience with high expectation and then followed by declines. After the downwards, the students would experience a recovery more or less to the initial level. The U-curve hypothesis was first put forwards by Lysgaard (1955), and Oberg (1960) originally used the terms 'honeymoon', 'culture shock', 'recovery' and 'full adaptation' to describe the four adjustment stages.

According to their self and cultural awareness, Adler (1975) then divided the cultural adjustment process into five stages, including initial contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy as well as independence (see Table 2.1.). Later on, other researchers applied the U-curve hypothesis in various aspects adjustment, such as social interaction with the locals, adjustment attitudes, knowledges about the host country, and homesickness as well (Chang, 1973, Davis, 1971, Torbiörn, 1982).

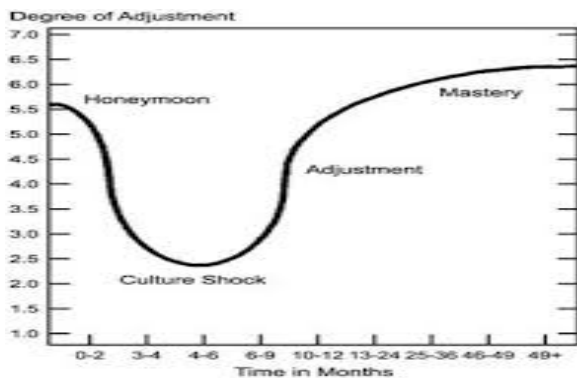


Figure 2.1 The U-curve hypothesis (Black and Mendenhall, 1991)(p.227)

Table 2.1 Five stages adaptive process by Adler (1975).

Stages	Main characteristics
initial contact	Fresh and exciting experience
disintegration	Disoriented and confusing period
reintegration	Rejection of the second stage
autonomy	Understanding the host culture
independence	Acquiring benefits form cultural differences and similarities

While the U-curve hypothesis reflected the peaks and valleys of adjustment over time, it took no consideration of the more progressive changes in identity (Adler, 1975) and the evidence for the hypothesis is now weak, inconclusive and overgeneralized (Church, 1982). In addition, the greatest challenges for the students was at the beginning of their stay in the host environment, due to a lack of knowledge of the host country and limited experience of interacting with the locals, according to Ward et al. (1998), there are two major shortcomings of the U-curve hypothesis, firstly, a number of studies were based on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal designs. Secondly, some confusion over the definition and measurement of the ‘adjustment’ is existed. Moreover, a research conducted by Kealey (1989) found that only 10% of the sample produced evidence of a U-curve of adjustment over the duration of two years studying abroad. Similarly, a study carried out by Brown and Holloway (2008) also stated that the initial stage of the students is not characterised by euphoria, instead, stress was at its most intense at the beginning stage. Besides, previous study also showed the that the

initial time is significant during the whole adjustment process, as the life changes dramatically at that time, interestingly, the adjustment process becomes more stable after the first stage, which is not appropriate to the U-curve hypothesis (Ward et al., 2004).

#### **2.3.4. Justification of introducing U-curve hypothesis**

Previous researches of adjustment discovered the importance of investigating their experiences, as it is more likely a process coping with change rather than a harmful incident (Ward et al., 2001). Models have been informed by theories of social identification, stress and coping (Zhou Y et al., 2008), for instance, a cultural learning model which especially designed for sociocultural adjustment (Ward et al., 2004), which deemed the adjustment process as acquiring particular skills related to the new environment. Besides, from the literature review in previous sections (see section 2.3.1.), although the model of acculturation is quite effective in interpreting the adjustment process, the relationship between sociocultural adjustment and psychological adaptation is still vague (Zhou Y et al., 2008). According to Ward et al. (2001), this model seemed not well integrated with the whole acculturation process and the relationship between international students' academic adjustment and their sociocultural and psychological adjustment need to be clarified further (Zhou Y et al., 2008). Therefore, the current study adapts the U-curve hypothesis model to focus on the academic, sociocultural as well as psychological adjustment of international students in a period of nine months. As the U-curve hypothesis has three stages in total, which start with an initial state of euphoria, develop into a crisis, anxiety and frustration, and then resulting in integration and adjustment (Ward et al., 1998), is quite similar with current research design (see section 3.1.). Additionally, Oberg (1960) discovered that the students who had been in the new environment between 6 and 18 months were less adjusted than those who lived in the context less than 6 months or more than 18 months, this longitudinal research was conducted at the beginning of their study till the end of their teaching period, which last for nine months, would test the previous literature again so as to find whether the students could adjust to the three domains successfully within this period.

For more than thirty years, the model of U-curve hypothesis was at the centre position in both research and theory on adjustment and adaptation (Ward et al., 1998). However, much contemporary study has found that the time span for the adjustment is not united, and the adjustment in different domains may not progress at the same degree (Coles and Swami, 2012). For instance, a study carried out by Daroesman et al. (2005) indicated that neglecting the issues related to making friends, feeling loneliness and experienced 'culture shock' were always mentioned in their early stage adjustment, the difficulties in making friends with the

locals were increased as time went by. Moreover, a research conducted by Coles and Swami (2012) found that although some students experience an initial stage of rapid adjustment, all subsequently encounter a long period of adjustment difficulty. Finally, a more recent study conducted by Chien (2016) applied the U-curve hypothesis to explain the changing process of a mixed group international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment but neglecting the psychological domain. Therefore, it is appropriate to introducing the U-curve hypothesis to this study and examining the relevant issues so as to find whether this model is still applicable nowadays and whether it is suitable to describe all the three domains (academic, sociocultural and psychological) among MA degree international postgraduate students.

#### **2.4. Empirical research on academic experiences and adjustment**

Academic adjustment is one of the most significant transitional processes that international students must experience while pursuing an overseas education. Previous research suggests moving from one learning context to another may be unsettling, especially for the international students (Zhai, 2002, Burns, 1991, King and Sondhi, 2018). An investigation on Saudi international students' adjustment to Australian universities found that Saudi students usually face challenges related to their academic studies (Alsahafi and Shin, 2017). They encountered more adjustment difficulties than the domestic students (Bailey, 2006, Alsahafi and Shin, 2017). A longitudinal study which consisted of 294 domestic and international student sojourners in a medium-sized, mid-western university also found that international students encounter special adjustment difficulties than student sojourners who move to a new place in their home countries (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002).

The major reason is that the culture of education differs from culture to culture, and country to country (Janjua et al., 2011). Similarly, Fan (2000) stated that in spite of culture being defined by various ways of reflecting various values, beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes, it remains central to how students approach learning. Moreover, teaching and learning approaches which differ from what they were familiar with would also become a source of complexity (Andrade, 2006). For instance, an investigation carried out among 163 Chinese students in four American universities and colleges found that the unsatisfactory experiences occurred when they have travelled from a culture where the educational tradition is textbook focused and teacher-focused to a culture where the educational environment encourage students to independently explore their personal interests in learning (Gu and Maley, 2008). Similarly, a project exploring Chinese international students adjustment in the United States discovered that it was not easy for them to adjust to the new learning environment because American educational and learning styles were complete different from their home country

(Yan and Berliner, 2011). Research regarding Chinese postgraduate students' academic adjustment experience in Australia also found that the teaching and learning approaches in Australian universities were different from the Chinese universities. They initially experienced anxiety, confusion and frustration as Australian academics focused more on practical skills rather theoretical knowledge. They provide students with more autonomy and cultivate their self-directed learning. Besides, for the sake of class participation, Chinese students seldom ask questions and were found to be hesitant and unwilling to ask questions to the teachers because they value thoughtful questions which are raised after sound reflections, and they were unsure with how to interact with the teacher and how to build a teacher-student relationship. Moreover, taking assessments into consideration, Chinese universities assessment is mainly based on final exams while in Australia, it may have various components, for instance, assignments submitted over the semester, group projects, presentations, exams and class participations, therefore, this assessment forms made the students change their learning strategies accordingly and exams were no longer a pressure (Wang and Shan, 2007). In addition, due to the cultural differences, international students need to adjust to the academic issues such as the writing styles. For instance, a study focused on Chinese and Vietnamese students' writing skills adjustment in an Australian university found that the adjustment of international students to disciplinary writing was diverse (Tran, 2007).

Another issue related to the academic adjustment is language. Among the students whose first language is not English, the ability to use English to an acceptable degree is especially important (Li et al., 2010, Wilson et al., 2019). Some researchers have found that international students experienced difficulty not only in communicating with their professors and classmates, but also in working as assistants, in writing academic assignments and when participating in class activities (Brown, 2008, Colombo, 2005, Al Fadda, 2012), indeed it becomes one of the reasons why they feel it is difficult to engage in collaborative works with the home students (Trice, 2007). The better a student's language skills are, particularly spoken language skills, the better the social interaction tends to be (Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002). Besides, lacking of confidence in their English proficiency and the fear of making mistakes hindered their class participation (Andrade, 2006). Therefore, experiences both inside and outside the academic contexts influenced each other and improved overall language English proficiency.

Except for culture factors and language proficiency, the knowledge of the host country was also found to be the key factors which facilitate student adjustment (Choi, 2006, Kinginger, 2013). Additionally, other factors or demographic characteristics were also found to



contribute to the academic adjustment of international students. For instance, a study exploring the relationship among marital status, ethnicity, academic achievement, and adjustment strains of graduate international students found that several demographic characteristics were associated with their academic adjustment, such as ethnicity and degree of study. It showed that master students had more difficulties in academic performance and language proficiency than the doctoral students (Poyrazli and Kavanaugh, 2006). Moreover, female students had more stress with the class discussion and learning strategies (Beaver and Tuck, 1999).

## **2.5. Empirical research on sociocultural and psychological experiences and adjustment**

International students from different backgrounds usually face and experience different issues regarding to the sociocultural adjustment while pursuing overseas studies. An empirical study carried out by Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) assess the relation of marital status, ethnicity and academic achievement in relation to the adjustment strains experienced by international students, found that in addition to the strain related to education and English language, Asian students experienced higher level strain associated to personal psychological experiences.

Moreover, a research examining the psychological adaptation of overseas and migrant students and Anglo-Australian students discovered that for migrant and overseas students, social relationship issues are pertinent to their adaptation, in terms of both psychological distress and academic satisfaction (Leung, 2001).

Additionally, international students usually face cultural differences and language barriers in their sociocultural adjustment (Zhai, 2002, Gündüz and Alakbarov, 2019). Learning new cultural norms, understanding other cultures and improving community inclusion were also the challenges facing the international students (Sherry et al., 2010, Liu et al., 2018).

Similarly, a project investigating Asian international students' academic adjustment in a U.S. graduate school mentioned culture knowledge as a problem. Though these problems are often misunderstood as language problems, these should be addressed in the context of cultural understanding (Choi, 2006). And adjustment experience is varied from person to person due to the differences in self-efficiency, social network and cultural diversity (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Yan and Berliner (2011) indicated that Chinese students experienced high levels of cultural shock and encounter greater difficulty adjustment to life in the United Kingdom. As they come from different cultural background, while entering a different culture, most of the familiar cues are removed and followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety. In addition, Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005) studied adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland found that pre-arrival information about material factors,

cultural issues such as the Scottish language or accent, participating in leisure and social activities and raising children in a foreign culture were also the obstacles in their adjustment process.

Moreover, social network and interaction are significant in sociocultural adjustment. A more recent research conducted by Xiong and Zhou (2018) focused on East Asian international students' adjustment experience in America found that international students thought help from various resources, including teachers and professors, friends and family, and the available resources in the university. Those who were satisfied with their social network were more likely to be content and less likely to feel lonely, and the numbers of friends, rather than close friends, might have been a better predictor of social network satisfaction. Wu and Hammond (2011) found that unless contact was facilitated through shared accommodation or in social or academic settings, their interaction with host students seldomly happened. Few students made close links with home students, one of the reasons was going to pubs, or campus bar, was a challenge even for those used to drinking. Schartner (2016) also revealed that international students had emotional and academic support from their domestic peers and other international students but did not feel compelled to mix with local students.

Therefore, it is essential to provide adequate services and available resources to improve international student's experiences. found that international students usually obtained less social support than the home students. Due to the different levels of language proficiency and cultural backgrounds, international students need special support that is differ from that of the host students (Lacina, 2002, Bender et al., 2019). Wu and Hammond (2011) indicate that the interaction and contact with the local students could benefit international students' adjustment. Similarly, Leung (2001) also agree that the relevant support service in social customs and educational systems are important for their sociocultural and psychological adaptation. Additionally, counselling services and language support classes were also essential to higher education institutions for a better international student's adaptation (Li et al., 2016).

## **2.6. Contributory factors for international students' adjustment**

### **2.6.1. English language ability**

English language ability consists of various dimensions of linguistic proficiency, which refers to non-native students' proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, understanding English as well as understanding and speaking the local dialect at the fixed host location and being familiar with local non-verbal communication.(Li et al., 2006). In addition, English language

proficiency, values and norms as well as whether familiar with the cultural differences are deemed as significant elements to comprehend the new culture (Selmer, 2006). Some studies have coincidentally indicated the importance of language ability to academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment (Beenstock et al., 2001, Selmer and Luring, 2015, Brunsting et al., 2018). According to a research conducted by Lee and Rice (2007), which focused on Chinese international students, found that although these student in general might encounter cultural difficulties and intolerance, the one with lower English language ability are especially likely to experience various adjustment problems (Brunsting et al., 2018). Relative low English language ability makes them unable to ask questions frequently and influence their performance on exams (Chen, 1999). Besides, a research conducted by Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006), indicated that English language ability also affect international students' sociocultural experiences, for those with higher English language ability, they usually have more intention to participate in the local culture and maintain their home culture at the same time. Moreover, for those international students with relative low English proficiency, they may also meet stereotype threat, which creates anxiety during their communication and has negative impacts on their communicative performance, would indirectly cause the loss of confidence (Wilson et al., 2019). Due to these reasons, international students with poor English language ability have more difficulty in interacting or forming close relationships with local students (Hirai et al., 2015). Growing research indicated that compared with the students who only form friendship with other international students or student from their home country, those who interact with local students experience better sociocultural, psychological as well academic adjustment, however, the hidden mechanism are not comprehensively interpreted (Szabó et al., 2020, Bastien et al., 2018).

### **2.6.2. Academic difficulties**

Unlike home students who are quite familiar with the academic system and have less problems regarding language ability and critical thinking ability (Bastien et al., 2018), for a number of international students, entering universities in a foreign country could be an overwhelming life challenges and cultural transition (Wu et al., 2015, Alshafi and Shin, 2017). Various researches in previous literature investigated the challenges and difficulties encountered by international students who pursuing overseas education , especially in academic setting (Zheng, 2010). Except for some common academic difficulties faced by both home and international students, such as issues in planning and organizing to complete assignments and task or achieve the programme's demands (Hoffait and Schyns, 2017), there

are also many other issues hindering smooth academic adjustment for international students (Wu et al., 2015).

First of all, difficulties in academic writing were mentioned a number of times in previous literature, as it could be difficult to be learnt or taught due to the fact that it is not just a simple activity, rather it is deemed as a complex production, which needs careful thought, concentration and clear principles (Alsaifi and Shin, 2017). Academic writing is not easy task, especially in a second language. For instance, a study carried out by Al Fadda (2012) indicated that the main academic writing difficulties for the students is to read and then to write in their own words, and it seemed to be difficult for them to paraphrase or summarize other's work. Additionally, Chou (2011) has listed a variety of reasons why international students facing many problems and under too much pressure while writing assignments, they might come from different cultural backgrounds and used to fully relied on their teachers and felt lacking of confidence to ask their teachers for clarification while they were not sure about the descriptions of the assignments.

In addition, according to some previous studies, international students, especially those from Asia, lacking of the critical thinking skills demanded by the universities in the West (Davies, 2013, Lee and Carrasquillo, 2006). As Paton (2011) stated, researchers in Australia found that Chinese international students didn't perform well in critical thinking because they used to follow a rote learning and lacking of involvement during discussions in class. However, other literature indicated that critical thinking doesn't need to take place in such an environment with debated discussion and argumentation (Rear, 2017). For instance, a research carried out by (Durkin, 2008) indicated that Asian students could adjust to the critical debate while remaining keeping harmony. Therefore, due to the differences mentioned above, in current study, factor related to critical thinking was reexamined to find out whether this difficulty still exist among the current sample. Moreover, other issues such as different learning styles, time management, doing independent study were also mentioned in research related to international students' academic difficulties (Sawir, 2005, Aduke 2015, Alghail and Mahfoodh, 2016).

### **2.6.3. Social support**

Social support refers to a variety kinds of support that people receive from others, consisting of instrumental (objectively) and emotional (subjectively) (Rose and Campbell, 2000, Solomon et al., 1987), it is the provision of both academic, sociocultural as well as psychological resources so as to satisfy a person's need for concern, approval, security and belongs (Cohen, 2004). In terms of instrumental support, it related to sharing material items

or services, it is particularly evaluated via self-reports of either the size of their social network or the actual received social support (Bender et al., 2019). Unlike the instrumental support which measures the actual support received from others, emotional support probes the interpretations and perceptions of oneself (Haber et al., 2007), which includes love, empathy and care (Franco et al., 2019). Social support helps the students to achieve and accomplish coping strategies, for instance, finding scholarships from the university (instrumental) and sharing their negative experiences to the others (emotional) (Franco et al., 2019).

Another variation in social support refers to the source of support. Previous literature often assumed that interaction or involvement in one's social network are generally supportive. A research conducted by Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) showed that more interaction with students from their home country would help the international students adjust to American society easily. Similarly, another study also found that support from their friends, who came from a same country, offered them feeling of belongingness and helped them stabilize their emotions (Maundeni, 2001). In addition, a more recent study carried out by Bender et al. (2019) indicated that international students' psychological adjustment experience were benefit from all types and sources of social support, especially the students from their home country. However, some other research argued that it might come at a cost. For example, Ward and Searle (1991) suggested that international students would be less positive in adjust to the host environment if their home culture are strengthen by close connection with conational. Moreover, Hendrickson et al. (2011) also discovered that intensive involvement with the student from their home country leads to the negative effects on international students' satisfaction for their lives.

Additionally, as far as the support from native network is concerned, a majority of studies reported that it would improve international students' psychological wellbeing (Hirai et al., 2015, Geeraert et al., 2014) but lacking of relations with their academic achievement as well as life satisfaction. There are also researches indicated that except for the support from the locals and the students from their home country, other groups of international students were also deemed as a potential source of support (Wang et al., 2017) , which will be included in this study as well. Therefore, in this study, the role of social support in the whole adjustment process were explored to find whether it could influence other factors over time.

#### **2.6.4. Social contact**

Social contact has been noted as a major contributor to emotional well- being, international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment for a long period of time (Ward et al., 2001), it is generally formed very quickly after their arrival as the desire for support (Gill and

Bialski, 2011), and dealing with difficulties faced by them, such as difference in education system, language barriers, issues relevant to transformed to a new environment as well as loneliness (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). The social contact patterns of international students have been focused by a number of researches (Brown, 2009). One of the earliest studies of international students' social contact found that students' primary network was associated with co-nationals, followed by the host nationals and other international non-conational (Bochner et al., 1977). The significance of having contacts with both co-nationals and the hosts in achieving adjustment success for international students were pointed out by a number of researchers (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998). As far as contact with host nationals is concerned, it could motivate the individuals to learn and imitate the tradition of host cultures and hold a positive attitude toward multiculturalism (Tip et al., 2012). A research conducted by Kashima and Loh (2006) focused on Asian international students' experiences in Australia, showed that the more contact with the local students, the better psychological adjustment they were.

In addition, some literatures discovered that international student's motivation to interact with local students was high, however, that relationships were difficult to maintain and sustain due to lacking mutual interests (Jacob and Greggo, 2001, Parks and Raymond, 2004, Schartner, 2015). For instance, sticking differences in habits and culture would hinder their interactions with the locals as well, it has been found that the students who came from non-western countries do not understand and like locals' drinking culture (Brown, 2009). Besides, a study carried out by Trice (2007) indicated that several international students interpreted their pressures of interacting and establishing social relations with the locals. Similarly, other more recent researches also strongly admitted that international students in the UK experience a lack of meaningful contact and interaction with the locals (Young et al., 2013, Schartner, 2015, Szabó et al., 2020).

Moreover, as the number of international students increased, a lack of diversity in their academic environment makes it even more difficult to contact with local people or other international students (Yu and Moskal, 2019). The unbalanced proportion of the students and the absent of diverse nationality in a particular university make them have less curiosity or interests which largely impact their establishment of connection with the people beyond their own group (Dunne, 2013). However, although international students have more opportunities for interactions among the locals in their daily life, such as meet at classrooms or share accommodation with them, as there were so few local students in their programme, the individuals were less intended to make local friends and their contacts still remain superficial (Mol and Michielsen, 2015, Yu and Moskal, 2019). A research by Kudo and Simkin (2003)

also found that the living together experience doesn't lead to a strong relationship with them. Although they presented in the environment around, they might not appear in their daily lives (Dervin, 2009, Sinanan and Gomes, 2020).

Whereas in terms of co-nationals, more literatures suggested that international students prefer to interact with the students from their home country, as it makes them comfortable to speak a common language, shared culture as well as instrumental support (Brown, 2009, Szabó et al., 2020). These students limits the possibility to make friends with those from other countries (Yu and Moskal, 2019), especially for the students from Asia (Smith and Khawaja, 2011), previous research which focused on Chinese international students discovered that in a mixed group, they intended to rely entirely on their Chinese peers due to lacking of confidence in daily communication and English language ability (Wilson et al., 2019). For some of these international students, online contact play a significant role in seeking and receiving necessary support during the adjustment process (Seo et al., 2016). However, although co-nationals provides support in a short period, it would do harm to their adjustment in various aspects in the long run (Mol and Michielsen, 2015). If the network is limited to co-nationals, even the international journey itself would lose its original meaning and prevent them from acquiring successful intercultural communication (Yu and Moskal, 2019). It is also believed that a strong with co-nationals would have negative effect on international students' overall satisfaction and social connection, and might hinder them forming relationships with host students (Hendrickson et al., 2011, Church, 1982).

Therefore, as the literatures lacking research which mainly focus on the MA degree's postgraduate international students and considering the participants in this study came from various countries, a further research is needed so as to investigate the patterns and relations among different groups of students.

## **2.7. Research questions**

Based on the previous literature review, this research seeks to answer the following main research questions:

1. What are international students' motivations and expectations for studying abroad?
2. How do international students perceive the experience of academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment over time?
3. Is the model of the U-curve hypothesis applicable to international students' academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment?

## 2.8. Summary

In this chapter, the fields of students' motivations for studying abroad, their adjustment to academic, sociocultural, and psychological life and the theoretical models that might help to explain the motivation and adjustment have been outlined and discussed in relevance to the current study.

In this research, the 'push-pull' model is introduced to understand and examine the mobility of students across borders and their motivations to study abroad

(McMahon, 1992). Studies seem to indicate that, there are various factors which would 'push' and 'pull' international students to leave their home country to study overseas. For instance, the lack of opportunities in their home countries, employer preference for overseas education or the 'pull' factors such as the reputation of the country or the university, teaching quality, opportunity to experience different culture as well as improve language skills (Wilkins et al., 2012). International students are a special population with unique characteristics which are different from the students in the host countries. Therefore, through the analysis and comparisons of the research findings, this research tends to analyse the students' choice of studying abroad through both the external factors and self-factors.

Based on the review of the literature, the U-curve hypothesis is usually used to conceptualise the cultural adjustment of international students. Several researches were based on cross-sectional studies rather than longitudinal designs, thus, this research aims to test the applicability of the U-curve hypothesis for three domains to identify whether there is variation across the academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment process. It is worthwhile for this research to investigate relevant issues and determine whether the theory can be adopted to support and explain the findings from the research.

The various aspects that emerged from the empirical studies have informed my decisions regarding the research content and the design of data collection process. These, together with a description and rationale of the research procedure and design will be presented in the following chapter.



## Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter will discuss the research methods used in this study, including the underlying theoretical paradigm, the principles informing the research design as well as ethical considerations. The chapter is structured as follows: detailed research design (3.1), its ontology, epistemology and methodology (3.2), mixed-methods (3.3), data collection procedure (3.4, and 3.5), details of the visual graph evaluation (3.6) and pilot study (3.7), the analysis techniques (3.8) and strategies to avoid potential research difficulties and limitations (3.9), followed by ethnical issues (3.10).

### 3.1. Research Design

With international students contributing heavily to the UK postgraduate student population (UKCISA, 2017), it is perhaps surprising that the majority of research exploring the experiences of international students is somewhat limited to undergraduate students (Bird, 2017). Therefore, this research was conducted at a university in the North of England (student population 23,864) and the participants of this study were all non- UK postgraduate students undertaking one-year master's degree programmes in the humanities and social sciences. Those programmes were highly 'international' in nature, with approximately 90% non-UK students. As many of these programmes are distinctive, they attract applicants from a wide range of cultural, demographic and professional backgrounds each year (Bird, 2017). In addition, as stated in previous research (Young et al., 2013), postgraduate international students are a very specific population, all of them obtained at least an undergraduate degree and some of them may have had previous working experience, therefore, they were likely to be more independent in making decisions to study abroad and the specific degree. Although the research sample is comparatively small, it offers a wide range of information about the international students' needs, expectations and experiences (Bock and Sergeant, 2002). This research followed a longitudinal mixed methods research design (see section 3.3.) which studies a single group of participants for a period of time, thus adopting a within-subjects or repeated-measures approach (Zohrabi, 2013). A longitudinal mixed methods research design was reasonable as it not only offered insights into students' adjustment experiences but also an in-depth account of how they change and develop over time (Wang, 2018). In particular, the focus was on issues in intercultural adaptability and continuity. Moreover, by comparison with other intercultural sojourners, for instance, business people and volunteers, academic life appears to be a major concern among international students (Ward et al., 2001). Therefore, study aimed to explore the factors which motivated international students to pursue overseas education and their subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment as well

as the relationship within these domains to provide a holistic view of their intercultural adjustment process. The study was carried out over one whole academic year in three stages (see Figure 3.1.), questionnaires were distributed at first and followed by three rounds of semi-structured interviews.

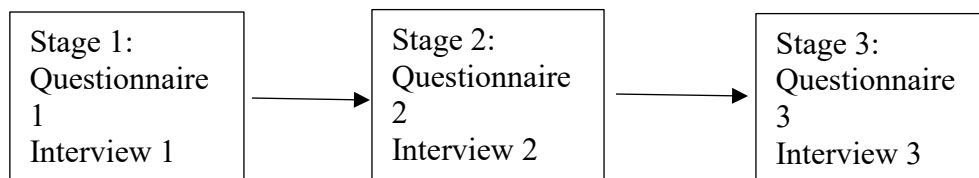


Figure 3.1 The procedure of data collection

Although in much of the methodological literature the qualitative phase is usually seen as the inquiry priority (Creswell et al., 2003), in the present study, both the quantitative and qualitative phrase had the same importance in the data collection process. The findings from the two aspects were then integrated into the final interpretation to produce more rich and innovative findings. The first interview was conducted at the beginning of the program, two weeks into the programme (October) exploring the international MA Degree students' motivations for study abroad, their expectations for academic studies, as well as initial sociocultural and psychological experiences. The second interview was scheduled at the beginning of their second semester, five months into the programme (February), to investigate students' adjustment as time went by. The third interview was conducted at the end of the taught period, nine months into the programme (June) to further monitor any changes in adjustment experiences over time. All the interview participants were purposely selected based on the maximum heterodoxy sampling strategy (see section 3.5.1). A short information sheet was given to the interviewees and a consent form was signed to make them more familiar with the research and build trust between the researchers and the participants (see section 3.9.1.). The interviews were audio recorded with their permission (Thomas, 2013) and the names of the participants are not identified nor any identifying personal information (see section 3.9.). In addition, the questionnaires were distributed to the full-time master's degree students at three-time stages both online and in classrooms to maximise the respond rate (see section 3.4.1). The survey included questions on demographic information, motivations to pursue overseas studies and their adjustment experiences in the three domains. The questionnaires allowed the researcher to determine any differences between the quantitative and the qualitative data, and verify whether the findings were consistent and to capture the phenomenon under study as comprehensively and completely as possible (Morse, 2003).

### **3.2. Significance of ontology, epistemology, and methodology**

Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are three essential concepts in social science research. This section discusses issues related to these three concepts and their relationships to offer a philosophical understanding of the nature of this project.

The first term 'ontology' is used to relate to the scientific and philosophical theory of being. It primarily looks at questions about what exists or can be said to exist and what exactly does it signify to exist in this world. In other words, ontology is concerned with the objects: 'is there a 'real' world 'out there' that is independent of our knowledge of it (Furlong and Marsh, 2002)'. The second term 'epistemology' represent the 'theory of knowledge' and 'the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality (Lehrer, 1990, Pollock, 1986). It focuses on issues such as knowledge or theories, whereas methodology is related to the methods or practices (Schmidt, 2008).

Traditionally, according to ontological and epistemological lines, social science research has been divided into two different perspectives, interpretivism and positivism. According to Chowdhury (2014), interpretivism refers to the approaches which emphasise the meaningful nature of people's character and participation in both social and cultural life, whereas positivism pays attention to the things that could be observed only, and rather than the things which are impossible to observe (Blaikie, 1993). That is to say that only if phenomena can be observed, they can be 'real'. The goal of interpretivism is to understand and interpret the meanings in human behaviour rather than to generalize and predict causes and effects (Neuman, 2000). However, the goal of positivist research is to seek objectivity and use consistently rational and logical approaches to research (Carson et al., 2001).

In general, the positivism paradigm is associated with quantitative methods, and the interpretivism paradigm is related to qualitative methods (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). The debates between these two paradigms have been called the quantitative-qualitative debates (Sale et al., 2002). However, some researcher insist that quantitative and qualitative methods are compatible and they are trying to find a more balanced position between purist positivism and interpretivism (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

As one of the main philosophical theories that stand additionally to the two traditionally divided paradigms in social science research, pragmatism is an approach which contains both quantitative and qualitative methods and introduce both inductive and deductive process (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Moreover, pragmatism accepts external reality and chooses interpretations which could produce the most desirable outcomes.

Therefore, this study applied the pragmatism approach, as it not only accepts the casual reality but also treats the social context as the key elements to understand the international students'

experience and the meaning which is formulated through their experience. This method has informed the adaptation of a mixed methods research design. Ontologically, the relevant knowledge about this study is originated from human action, preference or interests, and interaction among international students and relevant people around them, such as lecturers, administrators, classmates, researchers, and government officials. From the epistemological perspective, pragmatism is associated with practical solutions to the problems (Patton, 1990), and researchers adopting a pragmatic approach are inclined to introduce multiple or mixed methods approaches to reveal and examine both knowledge and questions (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, Patton, 1990).

### **3.3. Mixed methods research**

Mixed methods research is a research approach which applies two or more methods (Bryman, 2012), which collects, analyses and combines quantitative as well as qualitative data in order to achieve a better understanding of the research problem (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, Creswell et al., 2003). Consequently, it provides an opportunity to generate more meaning, thus enhancing the quality of data interpretation. Moreover, the use of the qualitative method could facilitate the quantitative element of the study (Bryman, 1988) and it is a step to utilizing the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2009).

According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), there are three major points why mixed methods can be considered preferable to single research approaches: firstly, it can answer research questions that other methodologies cannot; secondly, it provides better inferences; furthermore, it offers a chance for demonstrating a diversity of divergent views.

These advantages are realized in the present study. Firstly, as both the quantitative and qualitative approach were given equal priority, a mixed methods approach achieved a better understanding of the research problems compared to a single method approach. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches allowed the researcher to explore similar constructs in different ways, for instance, it could provide a deeper understanding of intercultural transitions of long-term student sojourners from an academic, social, and personal point of view via both surveys and interviews.

Secondly, the participants for the qualitative approach were the subsample of the quantitative participants. The same 16 interviewees were involved in the three waves of interviews, and they were selected from the first questionnaires surveys, within those who said that they were interested in the subsequent interviews at the end of the questionnaires. Through findings from the samples taken from the same research population, the mixed method research provided with an exploration of group trends based on the self-report questionnaires and

more in-depth personal reflections based on the interviews. Therefore, sampling from the same research population not only helped to design a proper qualitative interview with better measurement validity based on the earlier empirical quantitative survey findings, in addition to information from the literature review, but also allowed to make a comparison between the information investigated from the survey sample and the individual findings from the interviewees (Constantine et al., 2005).

Additionally, the mixed method approach offered a chance to investigate the changing process of students' adjustment from a longitudinal perspective. As far as Van Ness et al. (2011) is concerned, longitudinal research is a research approach that involves the repeated collection of at least one data source at three or more points in time. In order to analyse data which is collected in multiple times, visual graphical analysis techniques were involved (Brown et al., 2007) so as to explaining qualitative patterns (Saldan~a, 2003) or statistical approaches for repeated measures, for instance, the analysis of variance and the latent growth curve analysis (Clark et al., 2015). Thus, in this study, the international students' adjustments and experiences were investigated at the time when they first arrive, the time when they study for a while and the time at the end of the teaching period to identify how they perceive their satisfaction of needs over time via the analysis.

Furthermore, in this empirical study, the data collection process was sequential, where in each stage quantitative data were collected at first, and the qualitative data were collected and analysed second in the sequence and help to interpret, or elaborate on, the quantitative results (Ivankova et al., 2006). The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and their subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem, whereas the qualitative data and their analysis refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views deeply (Creswell et al., 2003, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

Moreover, as is suggested by Rauscher and Greenfield (2009), the integration of quantitative and qualitative data occurred at a number of points throughout the research process and provided more comprehensive perspectives for data analysis so that one data set could complement the other (Janice, 2003). For instance, firstly, it occurred in the data collection stage, the questionnaires not only contained options in quantitative responses, such as 6-point liker scales, single or multiple choice, but also covered open questions which were in the qualitative phrase. Secondly, all the interviewees participated in the questionnaire surveys before conducting the interviews, and the three interviews helped to examine the data at the micro-level to understand the international students' motivations to study abroad and subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological experience individually, whereas the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires provided macro information from a larger

international students' sample. Thirdly, as to the data analysis process (see section 3.8), all the interview data were transcribed and then analysed by frequency of the meaning words (in quantitative phrase) and the categorising (in qualitative phrase) as well.

### **3.4. Data collection: questionnaire survey**

In order to answer the research question and sub-questions of the study, a questionnaire was the main tool for the data collection in the quantitative phase. The main characteristic of a questionnaire, is that it is a written form of questioning (Thomas, 2013), which involves attempting to measure and quantify how intensely people feel about issues, as opposed to what they know or can do (Black, 1999). Moreover, questionnaires are one of the primary sources of obtaining data in any research endeavour (Zohrabi, 2013) and it is cheaper and less time intensive than other methods (Bryman, 2008). In the current study, closed question questionnaires were used, as it is easier and quicker for respondents to answer, and the response choices can clarify the meaning of the question for the participants.

At the beginning of October 2018, the first online survey was distributed, the instrument was named First Stage Survey (Appendix A) which comprised of a brief information sheet, consent form and background information. All the surveys were designed based on a review of relevant literature and adopted some previously published measures as well as some which were designed especially for the current study (See section 3.4.2.). Scales and survey items were selected according to the information related to the research questions. In the First Stage Survey (108 items), the participants were also asked to provide the following background information: place of origin, age, gender, first language, and English language ability. Two scales measured the significant elements that encourage students to study abroad and why in the UK. Both surveys included scales measuring academic, sociocultural, and psychological experiences and were distributed online as well as in person.

The online questionnaires were designed on the Jisc Online Surveys system via the IT support of the university. Everyone involved in the surveys was asked to answer all the questions, and their information was recorded automatically by the system. All the questionnaires were anonymous and only student identity numbers were provided for the statistical purpose. Additionally, in the First Stage Survey, an additional question was added at the end to recruit the students who were interested in the subsequent interviews.

The online questionnaires were initially emailed to some of the full-time, postgraduate, international students in with the assistance of the Postgraduate Program Secretaries.

However, with the low respondent rate (10%) and avoiding the bias, the researcher decided to choose the more direct ways to find the participants. The questionnaires were given at the end

of the classes with the permission of the lecturers, and it took the participants 10-15 minutes to complete. The researcher was present throughout the process to provide instructions and to answer any questions.

### **3.4.1. The participants**

The research population of this study consisted of full time, postgraduate international students studying MA Degrees in the humanities and social sciences at a British university in the north of England during the 2018-19 academic year. Convenience sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) (also known as Haphazard Sampling or Accidental Sampling) was adopted to recruit the participants for the questionnaire surveys as it is a type of non-probability or non-random sampling method where the sample is from a group of the target population that meet certain practical standards, such as easy to contact or reach, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate (Dörnyei, 2007, Saunders et al., 2012).

Convenience samples are sometimes deemed as ‘accidental samples’ as the elements may be selected in the sample simply as they just happen to be situated, spatially or administratively, near to where the researcher is conducting the data collection (Etikan et al., 2016). The main assumption related to the convenience sampling is that the participants involved in the target population are homogeneous, which means that there would be similar in the research findings gathered from whether a random sample, a nearby sample, a co-operative sample, or a sample gathered in some inaccessible part of the population (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The convenience sampling strategy in this research assisted to collect the information in a relatively speedy, easy, readily available, and cost effective way for data analysis (Henry, 1990). Through this approach, as the researcher is from the programme in humanities and social sciences, it would be easier to contact the lecturers and relevant administrative staff in some programmes within this domain so as to help the researcher to circulate the online surveys and ask for the permissions to distribute the questionnaires after the classes.

Table 3.1 below indicates sample’s demographics at three stages. In general, the sample as a whole was relatively young, with a mean around 24 at all these times. The age covered a wide range from 22 to 30 years old. A large number of participants were female, which shows a gender imbalance in both groups. Majority of the students in this study came from People’s Republic of China, the main resources of international students in the UK (UKCISA, 2017), whereas the others were from various countries. 10 students were first English language speaker, who came from America and Canada. All the respondents who mentioned English as their second language comes with an average IELTS scores of 6.5, which reached the requirements of their programme. Only around 9% of the students attended the pre-sessional

English class at the host university. Many of the international students within the sample spoke Mandarin (58.3%), followed by Vietnamese (10%) and Thailand (8.3%). The other first languages were related to Indonesian, English, French, Creek, Indian as well as Japanese.

Table 3.1 Demographics of the sample at each stage

Demographics	First stage (N=120)	Second stage (N=108)	Third stage (N=102)
<b>1. Gender</b>			
Female	99 (82.5%)	88 (81.5%)	85 (83.3%)
Male	21 (17.5%)	20 (18.5%)	17 (16.7%)
<b>2. Age</b>	M=24.2	M=23.9	M=23.8
<b>3. Place of origin</b>			
PRC	70 (58.3%)	67 (62%)	63 (61.8%)
Europe	4	4	3
Asia	41	32	31
North America	3	3	3
South Africa	2	2	2
<b>4. Pre-sessional English class</b>	12 (10%)	10 (9.3%)	9 (8.8%)

None of the participants had previous UK study experiences, and the previous travel abroad experience was not in common as well. Several respondents (80%) mentioned that it was their first time to go abroad. A few of participants (5%) indicated that they used to visit the UK as a tourist. Plenty of the international students (85%) stated that the UK was their first choice while making decision to pursue overseas study, whereas for the others, they indicated the other English-speaking countries, such as America, Australia, Canada, or New Zealand as their first destination. Among all the 120 students who had completed the first stage survey, there are respectively 108 and 102 of them participated the other two stage surveys.

### 3.4.2. Measures for the survey

The instruments used in the study were piloted (see section 3.7.) to establish validity and reliability prior to data collection.

#### *The advantages of self-report survey*

In this project, three waves of self-reported survey were conducted by three consecutive group of MA degree international students at the same university from the same school. The questionnaires were distributed at three-time stages, the beginning of their programme (October 2018), nine months into their programme (February 2019) as well as the end of their



teaching period (June 2019). Some of the measures were especially designed for this study whereas others were widely taken or slightly altered from the existing scales (see below). The specific survey items and scales were decided so as to answering the research questions (Rosenthal et al., 2010). Some related literature was referred prior to as well as during the process of questionnaire making. Three stages' questionnaires are attached in the Appendix (see Appendix A, B and C). All the questionnaires were answered on 6-point Likert scales except for those items related to demographic information and final open questions. The reason for using 6-point Likert scales was that an even number of rating the scale could avoid the neutral data, such as 'neither agree nor disagree', it encourage the participants to choose and commit to either the positive or negative answer, providing a comprehensive data (Nemoto and Beglar, 2014). During the three stages, all the respondents received English version questionnaires together with project information as well as consent form. These questionnaires consisted of some identical measurements which including scales measuring academic and sociocultural experience, academic difficulties, psychological wellbeing, satisfaction with life and overall adjustment experience. Besides, demographic information related to age, gender, nationality, first language, current programme and English language ability was also introduced in each survey. In the first stage survey (110 items), scales measuring motivation to study abroad and in the UK were also introduced (see Appendix A). In the second (79 items) and third (123 items) stages (see Appendix B and C) which measuring sociocultural contact and friendship networks, sociocultural activities, whether their academic difficulties were solved as time went by, university support service, advantages related to overseas education and visual graph evaluation. At both three waves, the questionnaire surveys were distributed at the end of their class, which took them 10-15 minutes to complete. For the statistics reason, the respondents were asked to offer their student identity numbers in all the surveys. A more comprehensive introduction of these scales was interpreted below, starting with the motivation to study abroad.

### ***The motivation to study abroad***

To evaluate what motivated students' decision to pursue overseas education, the Goals for Study Abroad Scale (Chirkova et al., 2007) was used. Based on the content of items and following the categorization suggested by Tartakovsky and Schwartz (2001), items 1, 2 and 5 were named as 'Preservation Factor' which refers to motivations for studying overseas in order to avoid dangerous and insecure conditions in their home countries. Whereas the other items were labelled as 'Self-Development Factor' which consisted of education and career goals for studying abroad. Moreover, another 10 Items scale was used to answer the question why they choose to study in the UK. All the items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1

(Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely agree). The Goals for Study Abroad Scale containing both push (unacceptable political and social condition, social conflicts in their home country, or promotional reasons) and pull factors (gain cross-cultural perspectives, travel, or knowing people from other countries) provided more options for the participants so as to achieve a more comprehensive result. The frequency of the items was then be calculated to find the most influential factors which motivated the international students to pursue overseas study.

### ***Academic adjustment***

The Student Sojourner Academic Adjustment Scale (Anderson et al., 2016) measures academic adjustment to the university with 9 items about the feelings and thoughts that students had about their ability to adjust in the host environment. It conceptualized as the fit between the individual and their temporary role as a student and as the drive for the student to continue and complete their academic sojourn (Anderson et al., 2016). The responses were measured on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (Complete Disagree) to 6 (Completely disagree). This scale was applied each stage questionnaire survey to measure international students' general academic experiences. The students were asked to choose the level of agreement or disagreement regarding the issues such as, academic performance, academic ability, resources of the university or English language ability. A comparison was made at the end of their taught period (third stage) to find whether their academic experiences were changed during the nine months period.

In all the three stages, a multiple-choice question which was self-designed named Student Sojourner Academic Difficulty Scale was added, which was related to the academic difficulties at the university, for instance, understanding the relative knowledge and what the lectures said, critical thinking ability, academic writing, time management and the UK learning style. The frequency of these items was then calculated to determine the most influential factors for academic adjustment.

### ***Sociocultural adjustment***

Students' sociocultural adjustment was assessed with 25 culture-general items from the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (Ward and Kennedy, 1999) which were relevant for the international students in the UK. The scale has been validated by various studies in several countries including Japan (Mira and Tomoko, 2010), the UK (Demes and Geeraert, 2014) and New Zealand (Wilson et al., 2017). It measured the number of difficulties an individual has experienced in various situations (e.g., making friends, getting used to local food). For each item, individuals respond to a 6-point rating scale, from 1 (completely unsatisfied) to 6 (completely satisfied), where lower score scores reflected more sociocultural adaptation problems. A meta-analysis conducted by Wilson et al. (2013) stated that the Sociocultural

Adaptation Scale have overall Cronbach's alpha of .88 out of the 66 studies included in the analysis.

Besides, self-designed single choice questions were added in the third stage survey regarding sociocultural contact and friendship networks. Participants were asked to choose one of the answers, including students or people from their home country or the country with similar culture to them, other international students, or British students. The frequency of these items was then calculated to find those who interact most with. Besides, another scale related to sociocultural activities was also designed as complement for measuring the social contacts. In terms of university support service, a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 6 (frequently) was introduced, the frequency was measured to find which service was the most helpful one.

### ***Psychological adjustment***

Psychological adjustment was assessed with both psychological wellbeing as well as satisfaction with life, which are commonly used in the psychological adjustment researches (Ward et al., 2001).

To evaluate psychological wellbeing, Scale of the College Adjustment Test (CAT) (Pennebaker, 2013) was introduced, which measures engagement, satisfaction, residential experiences and psychological wellbeing. The College Adjustment Test comprised of 18 items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree which is related to respondents' satisfactions towards their classes, roommates, and their feelings towards the psychological wellbeing. The frequency of these items was then calculated and compared so as to explore the changing process of international students' psychological adjustment.

As measure of students' life satisfaction, the Satisfaction with Life Scale was used. It is a five-item scale which put forward by Diener et al. (1985) measuring international students' life satisfaction which based on their cognitive self-evaluation. The participants were asked to rate their answers on a scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree), among which the higher scores indicate a greater life satisfaction.

### **3.5. Data collection: semi-structured interviews**

Unlike the quantitative research methods which mainly pay attention to discovering the general law in order to describe the reality (Flick, 2018), and using experiments to test the hypothesis, qualitative research methods are focusing on helping us with a better understanding of the world in which we live and lead to the improvement of a new theory. As interview is probably the most extensively used strategy for collecting qualitative data (Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), and is currently becoming the central resource for the

researchers who are doing qualitative research (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997), about 90% of social science researches relies on the interview (Briggs, 1986). The use of interview as a means to elicit data can deepen the understanding of the participant's lived experiences (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997, Potter and Hepburn, 2005). With the combination of the structured and unstructured interviews, the semi-structured interviews provides the best of both worlds as far as interview is concerned (Thomas, 2013). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a general plan of the topic to be discussed without fixed sequences of the questions or the words. The interviewees have the freedom to decide their length of the answers as well as the way they answer (Flick, 2018). The goal of this interview is to encourage the participants to share their own opinions according to their own experiences (Packer, 2011). Besides, there are also other strengths in semi-structured interviews. First, compared to the instruments, it is a more practical way of gathering qualitative data about the things that cannot be easily observed. Second, the interviewer could probe the range of the topic based on the answer of the participants (Roulston, 2010).

Therefore, in order to conduct research on the international students' adjustment, semi-structured interview was introduced to this study for the individual information collection from 16 postgraduate international students.

### **3.5.1. Participants**

The samples of this research were based on the maximum variation sampling strategy which considered the equal distribution of demographic characteristics, for instances, geographic areas (Asia, Europe, Middle East, Africa and Oceania), gender, programmes and language ability. According to Patton (2002), a maximum variation sample is to identify the key dimensions of variations and then finding cases that vary from each other as much as possible. Besides, employing maximum variation sampling could identify essential features and variable features of a phenomenon and help to collect the broadest useful research information. Through this approach, the participants would come from more various background with a broad range of experiences derived from the interactions between external environments and internal characteristics. Therefore, this sampling strategy was expected to collect the most possible information of the postgraduate international students' experience from the most diverse backgrounds, such as geographic area or continent of origin, gender, so as to achieve the more precise results.

In this study, a semi-structured interview method was applied to explore the international students' (16 in total) adjustment longitudinally and qualitatively. Three face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted respectively at the beginning of October, February and

June. All the participants involved in the interviews were the volunteers from the First Stage Survey (see section 3.4.1), and in consideration of the maximum variation sampling strategy, the researcher tried to recruit the interviewees in various origins even though many of the volunteers were from China.

There were 40 volunteers in total and all of them were contacted via email to confirm their interests and informed that everyone who volunteered involved in this project would be asked to attend all the three waves of interviews. From those who responded, the following 16 were selected as the interviewees (Table 3.2.).

Table 3.2 Interviewees' information

Number	Country of Origin	Gender	Age
001	Vietnam	Female	23
002	France	Female	24
003	China	Female	22
004	Japan	Female	23
005	Vietnam	Female	23
006	China	Male	23
007	Indonesia	Female	24
008	India	Male	24
009	China	Female	23
010	South Africa	Male	24
011	Vietnam	Male	25
012	Thailand	Male	23
013	Canada	Female	26
014	America	Female	22
015	India	Female	22
016	Greece	Female	23

The 16 interviewees (5 males and 11 females) were from 11 countries 15 cities and 10 first languages between the ages from 22-26. And all of them did their undergraduate degrees in their home country with programmes in humanities or social sciences. Among them, 3 students visited the UK for travelling and none of them had ever exchanged or studied in the UK. Apart from two students from Canada and America, all the participants spoke English as their second language and only one of them attended the pre-sessional English course prior to the programme. The interviews were conducted in English, as the students' average IELTS score was 7.0 (according to their questionnaire results), and their qualified English language ability enable them to communicate smoothly. During the first interview, one of the Chinese students asked that if she could answer the questions in Chinese, although she spoke good

English, she felt more confident in speaking Chinese. The researcher agreed to do so, but finally she changed her mind, due to the reason that she was worried about whether the subsequent transcription and translation could interpret her feelings and opinions accurately.

### 3.5.2. Interview process

During each interview process, students were asked several open questions and asked to describe their experiences in pursuing an overseas education. The interview questions were asked carefully, and the researcher would ask for further description if the information needed deeper investigation. For instance, while asked questions related to the motivations to study abroad, many of them only focused on one or two points and always neglect the external factors, therefore, the researcher ask them whether they could answer it comprehensively and tried to find a better result.

All of the interview questions were designed based on the research questions, and in order to follow the design principles (see section 3.1.), three interview schedules (Table 3.3) were prepared and structured as the guiding tools for the semi-structured interviews so as to enable the data collection process within some adaptability and freedom (Van Ness et al., 2011).

Three face-to-face interview rounds were conducted, audio recorded, and hand-written notes were taken. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in full. The participants were asked the same set of open questions in the same order which made it easier for the future comparison, data analysis and interpretation (Clark et al., 2015). The interviews took about 20-50 minutes individually regarding different stages.

Table 3.3 The interview processes

Stage	Time
1	October Three weeks into the programmes
2	February The beginning of the second semester Five months into the programmes
3	June The end of teaching period Nine months into the programmes

In the research, the interviews were conducted with the same participants in order to track their adjustment process over time (Wang, 2018). The period between each stage were about three months.

### **3.6. Data collection: Visual graph evaluation**

During the third stage questionnaire survey and interviews, a visual graph (see Appendix C and H) containing 10 different patterns was adopted to measure the changing process of international students' academic, sociocultural, psychological, and overall adjustment over time. The questionnaire survey participants were asked to choose one graph which suits their adjustment the best, whereas the interviewees were required to choose the suitable graph at first and then explaining the reason why it is the most appropriate one to describe their adjustment experiences over time. The aim to use this visual graph was to provide accurate expression for their adjustment process to avoid any verbal expression ambiguity and it allows the study to capture international students' lived experiences. This visual graph was firstly designed by Chien (2016) to measure interviews' academic and sociocultural adjustment situation, whereas this study used it in a wider range, for both questionnaire surveys and interviews, evaluating four different domains. The purpose of this supporting graph was to see if the adjustment process of international students' adjustment mirrored the U-curve hypothesis.

### **3.7. Pilot study**

The term 'pilot study' refers to mini versions of a full-scale study and the specific pre-testing of a particular research instrument such as a questionnaire or interview (Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). The reasons for conducting pilot studies are as follows. Firstly, it is a crucial element of good study design for it to not only attempt to ensure that survey questions operate well, but also ensure that the research tools as a whole function well (Bryman, 2008). Secondly, it fulfils a range of significant functions and can provide valuable insights for other researchers (van Teijlingen et al., 2000). In addition, whether the sampling frame and technique are effective in identifying logistical problems should also be considered. Furthermore, taking questionnaires into consideration, a pilot study aims to clarify any confusion that may exist, and uncover potential problems, such as the presence of vague questions (Bryman, 2012).

Therefore, in this study, the first two participants in all these three stage interviews were seen as the pilot study cases (see Table 3.4.). The purpose of pilot interviews was to identify whether the researcher could control the timing well and whether there is a need to modify the interview questions.

And in terms of the questionnaire survey, before conducting the formal online questionnaire survey, ten participants (Table 3.5) were involved in the pilot study so as to improve the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire design. The purpose of introducing

the pilot study was to discover whether the content was fully understood by the student and whether the explanation of the questions was clear. The questionnaires were then revised according to the pilot participants' recommendations. For instance, there was another question in the background information part which was related to the financial support of the family, some pilot participants suggest that was a kind of repetition to the last question which was about the main resources for the tuition fees and living expenses. Therefore, the question was deleted from the final version of the questionnaires. In addition, another essential task of the pilot study was to identify how much time did it take respondents to answer the whole questionnaires. In general, the participants took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete all the questions. The results seemed to be acceptable, and the structure of the survey was maintained.

Table 3.4 participants' background information in the interviews

Participants	Age	Gender	Country of origin	Overseas experience
1	24	Female	Indonesia	Yes
2	23	Female	Thailand	No

Table 3.5 Participants' background information in the questionnaire survey

Participants	Age	Gender	Country of origin	Overseas experience
1	23	Female	China	Yes
2	24	Female	Thailand	No
3	23	Female	China	No
4	24	Male	Vietnam	No
5	25	Female	South Korea	Yes
6	22	Female	Indonesia	No
7	24	Male	France	Yes
8	23	Female	China	No
9	26	Male	Indonesia	Yes
10	24	Female	America	Yes

### 3.8. Data Analysis

#### 3.8.1 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data was analysed through the computer software: Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to compute the responses percentages,



measures of central tendency, and to compare the descriptive features of variables. Pearson's product moment correlations were used to investigate the degree of association among the variables. Additionally, Pearson Correlation was adopted in the analysis process to determine if two variables share a linear relationship and statistical significance is established at  $p \leq .05$ , but also a statistical measure of the strength of the relationship between the relative movements of two variables (Heale and Twycross, 2015). In the current research, Pearson Correlation was introduced to measure the relationships between the overall adjustment and adjustment in other three domains (academic, sociocultural and psychological). Moreover, one-way ANOVA with repeated measures was used to compare international students' academic, sociocultural, psychological, and overall adjustment over time. An ANOVA with repeated measure is usually used to compare three or more group means where the participants are the same in each group (Ross and Willson, 2017). In this study, a repeated measure ANOVA was used to understand whether there was a difference among international students during the nine months (with three time point: the beginning of their programme, the beginning of second semester, and at the end of taught period).

### **3.8.2 Qualitative data analysis**

As qualitative data analysis needs tremendous attention to digging into the deeper and more concealed meanings of the opened-ended data collected from questioning the research participants continuously within the special socio-cultural contexts of the study (Sale et al., 2002). Therefore, thematic content analysis (TCA) was introduced into both open questions in the questionnaires and the interview transcripts as it emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data which was collected from student interviews was transcribed verbatim into textual information for further analysis. Sometimes the problems in understanding the accents of the participants were encountered during the transcription process and these kinds of difficulties were overcome by replay the audio recorder and listened to the content several times. The data was analysed manually, and the process of direct analysis included coding the data in order to put it into categories, reflecting on the data, organizing the data in order to look for patterns and themes, and connecting discoveries to an analytical and conceptual framework (Richards, 2003). In this research, the data analysis procedure was focused on meaning. The data was read thoroughly multiple times to form initial impressions about the data and be familiar with it. Coding and theme development began with consideration of the three main areas for exploration in this study: academic, sociocultural, and psychological experiences in each stage. These pre-defined codes were broad with the main purpose of categorizing information for further

examination. The identified statements were organised and the frequency of the similar statements from all the transcripts was counted (Constantine et al., 2005).

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2009), there are three modes for qualitative analysis, including analysis focusing on meaning, language and general analyses. In this research, analysis focusing on meaning was the main mode for the interview data analysis.

After reading the interview transcripts several times, the interviewees' responses were summarised based on the five steps: the procedure is beginning with familiar with the data, following by generating initial codes, searching for themes, defining and naming the theme and producing the result (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Based on the data, international students' comments on adjustment were generally grouped into four broad themes for analysis: positive, negative, problematizing, and neutral (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Positive comments related to those contained positive words, indicating good feeling or experience during the adjustment process (such as good, happy, satisfied or like), whereas the negative comments related to those negative words, such as worried, tired, or unsatisfied. Students' comments that were neither positive nor negative but contained meanings relating to problems or concerns in their adjustment are defined as problematising comments. Neutral comments regarding those are neither positive nor negative but provide information about students' adjustment process. The statements in the four broad categories were examined further for the content and placed under the appropriate themes or headings, grouped with other similar ones (Hannan, 2007) according to different domains. The examples of the four themes are presented as follows:

Table 3.6 Themes used to analyse the qualitative data

Positive	Negative	Problematising	Neutral
I appreciate that we have a lot of contact with some of the professors and personal tutors. That's great (013, Canada)	I don't like the weather here (007, Indonesia)	The lectures were difficult for me to understand because of the speed (008, India).	There are fewer classroom hours, a lot of reading (013, Canada)

### 3.9. Strategies to avoid potential research difficulties and limitations

#### 3.9.1. Withdrawal of participants and low response rate

The withdrawal of interview participants and low response rate in questionnaire survey are the potential research difficulties in this longitudinal research. In order to avoid these difficulties, various strategies were introduced. For instance, an information sheet and informed consent form. Firstly, a short information sheet and the consent form were attached

to the questionnaire to build trust with the participants and make them become more familiar with the research. Secondly, a consent form was signed by the interviewees and the researchers, and they were well identified their rights and contributions which would improve the accuracy of the research findings. Moreover, as a thanks for their time, £10 vouchers were given to all the interviewees at the end of the third stages and £5 voucher for 10 participants in the questionnaire surveys for encouraging them to join the interview but nor for the particular answers (Creswell et al., 2003).

### 3.9.2. Validity and Reliability of the Quantitative Survey

In social research, validity and reliability are two essential criteria to measure the quality of an instrument. Validity is defined as the degree to which a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study (Heale and Twycross, 2015). There are three major types of validity, content validity, construct validity and criterion validity (Table 3.7), among them, contrast validity is also known as measurement validity and often indicate whether the design of a concept or measurement really reflects what it is supposed to mean and to be measured (Bryman, 2008).

Table 3.7 Types of validity

Types of validity	Description
Content validity	The extent to which a research instrument accurately measures all aspects of a concept
Construct Validity	The extent to which a research instrument (or tool) measures the intended concept
Criterion validity	The extent to which a research instrument is related to other instruments that measure the same variables

Generally, these three types of validity well applied to the experience of international student adjustment. Firstly, the definition of the key concepts was well defined according to the previous literature review and the items in the questionnaire survey were designed to examine what is supposed to measure accurately. Secondly, the potential impact of the data collection or research findings were carefully considered and interpreted. Moreover, based on Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), there are two strategies to decide the validity of a measurement, the first one is to ask the experts in this area to help with evaluating whether the research tools could measure what is expected to measure. Another one is to collect the data according to the outcomes of the measurements. Therefore, in the current study, apart from the professional advice of the supervisors the empirical data was collected through a pilot

study of ten international students to evaluate the validity of the survey and ensure the quality of the findings.

Whereas in terms of credibility, it refers to the consistency of a measure, it is the degree to which a questionnaire, test, observation or any measurement procedure produces the same results on repeated trials (Bolarinwa, 2015). In short, it is the stability or consistency of scores over time or across rates. Homogeneity (or internal consistency), stability and equivalence are three attributes of reliability (Table 3.8) (Heale and Twycross, 2015).

Table 3.8 Attributes of reliability

Attributes of reliability	
Homogeneity (or internal consistency)	The extent to which all the items on a scale measure one construct
Stability	The consistency of results using an instrument with repeated testing
Equivalence	Consistency among responses of multiple users of an instrument, or among alternate forms of an instrument

In the current study, the researcher pay more attention to evaluate the internal consistency reliability coefficient as it is one of the common form that often conceptualised in quantitative research (Muijs, 2004). According to Huck (2000), there are two main ways of calculating internal consistency reliability: split half reliability and coefficient alpha. As far as Split half reliability is concerned, the test will be randomly split into two, and the respondents' scores on each 'half test' will then be calculated and see whether the two scores are related to one another. If they are both measuring the same thing, they are expected to be strongly related, with a correlation coefficient of over 0.8. Whereas in terms of Coefficient alpha, if the measure is over 0.7, the test would be internally consistent. Comparing to the other techniques, Coefficient alpha is of more functions, for instance, it could be used with instruments made up of items that can be scored with three or more possible values (Huck, 2000). Therefore, based on the guidelines from Field (2009), as for the quantitative data from questionnaire survey, SPSS was introduced for the reliability of Coefficient alpha so as to discover the internal consistency of the different 6-point Likert-type scales, ranging from completely disagree (1-point) to completely agree (6-point) in this project. Internal consistencies for the six different scales which measuring motivations to study abroad and issues in other three domains (academic, sociocultural, and psychological) among the current samples are generally high, with Coefficient alpha ranging from 0.73-0.85 which indicated high reliability (see Table 3.9).

Table 3.9 Coefficient alpha in each scale

Scales	Coefficient alpha
The Goals for Study Abroad Scale	0.79
The Student Sojourner Academic Adjustment Scale	0.73
The Student Sojourner Academic Difficulty Scale	0.81
The Sociocultural Adaptation Scale	0.78
The College Adjustment Test	0.83
The Satisfaction with Life Scale	0.85

### 3.10. Ethical Issues

Before conducting the current research, the research proposal was approved by the university ethnics committee. All participants received information sheets and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

The purpose of the consent form was to inform participants about what they are going to be asked, the essence of the research how the data will be used and stored, how their anonymity will be preserved and their right to withdraw at any time (Seale et al., 2004). All the participants were given time to read carefully throughout the consent form before signing and starting the interview. The copy of the consent form was also kept by each of the participant. Additionally, in consideration of confidentiality, this research follows the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the Research Ethics Committee of the university. All the information provided by the interviewees is treated confidentially and will be used for academic research purposes only. Moreover, the names of the participants will not be identified or associated with their personal information; instead, a student number was used for the purpose of research identification. As the research project mainly focuses on the international postgraduates 'experience, sharing part of their private lives with the interviewer cannot be avoided, therefore, while using audio recording during the interview, it is essential to obtain permissions from them and keep it secure, for instance, in a personal computer with power-on passwords. The collected and analyzed data is kept for a designated period of time, for five to ten years, in order to protect interview participant's human rights and privacy (Sieber, 1998).

Furthermore, for the sake of making both the practice and the researcher trustworthy (Fine, 1993), a partnership between the researcher and the respondents based on the mutual respect is useful to the research. However, based on the guideline of the BERA, the researcher was avoiding of using the pressure of friendship to encourage them to join in the interview, all of them were volunteers and had the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Among

those volunteers, some of them indicated that what encourage them to participate in this research was due to their particular interests in this project and one of the interviewees stated that she planned to pursue PhD study in this field and this experience would help her become more familiar to the related knowledge. Therefore, their interests motivated them being very comfortable about sharing their information, experiences, and feelings which helped with better interview data collection.

## Chapter 4. Findings: Motivations and Expectations

The purpose of this research is to investigate full time international students' motivations to study abroad and their subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological experiences at a British university. Three qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interview rounds, and quantitative questionnaire surveys were conducted during the data collection process. Chapter Four aims to interpret the findings regarding motivations and expectations to pursue overseas education based on the data collected in the first stage (October 2018). This chapter consists of five sections: section one and two focused on the factors that motivates international students to study abroad or in the UK, whereas the other sections provide information about their preparations and expectations to study in the UK.

### 4.1. Motivations to study abroad

This section mainly interprets the findings regarding students' motivations to study abroad, reasons to study in the north part of the UK in particular. It uses the data from both the first questionnaire survey and the first stage interview. Findings related to overseas study preparation; future planning are also illustrated. 16 students took part in the interviews and 120 participants took part in the questionnaire survey.

#### 4.1.1 Quantitative findings

The questionnaire introduced in this study (see methodology chapter) also includes a question related to students' motivations for studying abroad. A six-point Likert-type scale was introduced, scores for each item range from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). Overall, 120 students were answered the questionnaires. Table 4.1 represents the results of the survey, including mode, mean, frequency, and percentage. These findings will be compared with the data from the interviews on the same theme, which were interpreted previously.

Table 4.1 Quantitative information on motivations to study abroad

Item	Mode	Mean	Level of Agreement/ Disagreement					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. I wanted to avoid the unacceptable political and social conditions in my home country.</b>	2	1.94	39 (32.5)	65 (54.2)	8 (6.7)	1 (0.8)	6 (5.0)	1 (0.8)
<b>2. I wanted to avoid ethnic and social conflicts in my home country.</b>	1	1.75	64 (53.3)	41 (34.2)	4 (3.3)	4 (3.3)	6 (5.0)	1 (0.8)
<b>3. I am planning to immigrate in the future.</b>	3	3.55	7 (5.8)	19 (15.8)	35 (29.2)	27 (22.5)	24 (20.0)	8 (8.7)
<b>4. I wanted to have more freedom and be independent.</b>	4	3.86	3 (2.5)	11 (9.2)	38 (31.7)	28 (23.3)	28 (23.3)	12 (10)

<b>5. I want to gain international and cross-cultural perspectives</b>	5	5.25	0	2 (1.7)	4 (3.3)	3 (2.5)	64 (53.3)	47 (39.2)
<b>6. I wanted to get a good education or to have a good academic experience.</b>	5	5.41	0	0	2 (1.7)	3 (2.5)	59 (49.2)	56 (46.7)
<b>7. I want to increase the level of my English language skills</b>	5	4.73	3 (2.5)	4 (3.3)	5 (4.2)	19 (15.8)	68 (56.7)	21 (17.5)
<b>8. I wanted to expand my career and life opportunities.</b>	6	5.36	1 (0.8)	2 (1.7)	3 (2.5)	5 (4.2)	45 (37.5)	64 (53.3)
<b>9. I want to travel</b>	4	4.03	3 (2.5)	14 (11.7)	22 (18.3)	33 (27.5)	33 (27.5)	15 (12.5)
<b>10. I want to have fun and have a good time</b>	5	4.30	4 (3.3)	7 (5.8)	23 (19.2)	23 (19.2)	41 (34.2)	22 (18.3)
<b>11. I want to get to know people from other countries</b>	5	4.85	2 (1.7)	5 (4.2)	6 (5.0)	15 (12.5)	60 (50)	32 (26.7)
<b>12. I want to gain other life skills</b>	4	4.09	2 (1.7)	5 (4.2)	26 (21.7)	41 (34.2)	39 (32.5)	7 (5.8)
<b>13. My family encouraged, supported, or expected me to do so.</b>	5	4.63	3 (2.5)	3 (2.5)	10 (8.3)	25 (20.8)	57 (47.5)	22 (18.3)
<b>14. My previous study or travel abroad experiences.</b>	5	4.38	4 (3.3)	6 (5.0)	16 (13.3)	30 (25.0)	43 (35.8)	21 (17.5)
<b>15. I receive the funding from the government or the current university</b>	2	2.67	26 (21.7)	38 (31.7)	27 (22.5)	15 (12.5)	7 (5.8)	7 (5.8)
<b>16. My job requires me to upgrade my educational qualifications or professional knowledge</b>	1	1.98	53 (44.2)	36 (30.0)	14 (11.7)	8 (6.7)	7 (5.8)	2 (1.7)
<b>17. The influences from my friends with study abroad experience.</b>	5	4.82	2 (1.7)	5 (4.2)	5 (4.2)	23 (19.2)	50 (41.7)	35 (29.2)
<b>18. It is a popular trend in the globalized era.</b>	5	4.85	1 (0.8)	4 (3.3)	6 (5.0)	18 (15.0)	63 (52.5)	28 (23.3)
Levels of Agree/Disagree: 1 – Completely Disagree; 2 – Mostly Disagree; 3 – Slightly Disagree; 4 – Slightly Agree; 5 – Mostly Agree; 6 – Completely Agree								

In the above Table, overall agreement indicates the total of those who chose 4, 5 and 6 in the six-point Likert-type scale, whereas the overall disagreement refers to the students who selected 1, 2 and 3. Mean scores are introduced to interpret the degree of agreement or disagreement.

Based on the data from the questionnaire survey (see Table 4.1), international students' motivations to study abroad could be divided into two groups, positive and negative reasons. As shown in the Table, according to the overall agreement, there were number of factors which affected their decision to pursue overseas education. It ranges from a high level of overall agreement for gaining international and cross-cultural perspectives, getting a good education or having a good academic experience, and expending career and life opportunities (over 95% of both) to some relatively low overall agreement such as, language improvement



and getting to know people from other countries (85%-90%). With nearly 80% of students agreeing that the family encouragement and their previous study or travel experiences played a role. In addition, travelling, having a good time and gaining other life skills were just over 70% of the overall agreement. The other factors were listed as less significant in the decision-making process. The least significant were the unacceptable political and social conditions, ethnic and social conflicts as well as the job required to upgrade educational qualification (with over 90% of students overall disagreeing with the importance of these factors), with other factors such as immigration plan or having more freedom and be independent, with the means approximately 3.

According to the international students' motivations to study abroad, the above 18 questionnaire items were divided into four categories: value of the overseas study, personal or family related reasons, financial factors, and others in order to compare the findings from quantitative questionnaires with the semi-structured interviews in-depth (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Four categories of questionnaire items on motivations to study abroad

<b>Category</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Value of the overseas study</b>	5, 6, 7, 8 and 18
<b>Personal or family related reasons</b>	4,6, 8, 9, 10,11, 12, 13, 14and 17
<b>Financial or promotional factors</b>	15, 16
<b>Others</b>	1, 2, and 3

According to the information from the questionnaire survey, in terms of both value of the overseas study and personal related reasons, questionnaire items 6 and 8 (to get a good education or to have a good academic experience and to expand career and life opportunities), both associated with students' expectations of the overseas study, are two positive factor which motivate international students' decision to study abroad. They related to both items ('to study at a world-class university and expecting advantages from it' and 'to experience a unique experience') of the qualitative interview results and achieved overall agreements of 98.3% and 95%, with a mean score of 5.41 and 5.36 respectively, which are the top two highest scores among all the items. This indicate that items 6 and 8 are very positive items in evaluating students' motivations to pursue overseas study. In addition, 7 of 16 participants during the interviews claimed that they decided to study abroad because they realized the importance of studying at a world-class university and expected advantages from it, which belongs to the category of value of overseas study. Moreover, 8 of 16 interviewees admitted that the reason why they decided to study abroad is that they want to have a special academic experience and would have more choices in the future, which ascribed to the topic of personal

or family related reasons. Therefore, it appears that both qualitative and quantitative findings strongly support each other according to items 6 and 8.

Questionnaires items 5 and 7, both associated with the advantages of studying abroad, and item 18, associated with the growing tendency of overseas study, are all related to the category of 'value of the overseas study', and they could compare with the qualitative interview data as well. Overall agreement in terms of item 5 was high, 95%, indicating that it was a positive factor in the decision-making process. Additionally, 10 of 16 interviewees claimed that they chose to study overseas because of wanting to acquire international perspectives, which indicates a correspondence between the two sets of data. However, the other two items (7 and 18), show different results, for instance, the overall agreement in relation to item 7 was high whereas in terms of qualitative data, only a few students (4 of 14) during the interviews mentioned their purpose of increasing of English language proficiency, which is not strongly supported by the findings from the questionnaire survey. Moreover, there is more agreement that 18 (popular trend in the globalized era) was significant (mean score was 4.8500), which is different with the findings from the qualitative results. According to the findings from the interviews, only three participants mentioned this point.

In terms of personal or family related reasons, getting to know people from other countries (item 11), family encouragement and expectations (item 13), previous study or travel abroad experience (item 14) and influence from friends (item 17) were deemed similarly important by students in both questionnaire survey and interviews. For these reasons, a majority of students considered these significant. On the other hand, there was less agreement in reasons related to having more freedom and be independent (item4) and gaining other life skills (item12). For both factors, less participants took them into consideration while making decisions, especially among the interviewees. According to the qualitative data, only 2 out of 16 interviewees a low number, mentioned that the desire to be more independent motivated them to study abroad. But the overall agreements in the survey was slightly over half. As regard to acquiring new life skills, only one student indicated that the reason of study abroad was to gain another life skill. Overall agreement regarding to item 12 was low, which was somewhat similar to the qualitative findings. As to other factors in this category, the two sets of data provide opposite findings. For instance, the factor related to travel (item 9) and having good time (item10), the overall agreements were relatively low, whereas more than half of the participants during the interviews identified them as important factors. Therefore, based on the above information, questionnaire item 11, 13, 14 and 17 strongly and positively support the qualitative results, whereas others not to some extent.

Regarding financial reasons (item 15), the quantitative results similar to qualitative interviews. Both questionnaire survey (a mean score of 2.67) and interview revealed a lower level of overall agreement. Additionally, in relation to promotional factors (items 16), overall agreements in both sets of data were low, possibly because less participants in the study have previous working experience.

Other reasons, such as avoiding unacceptable political and social conditions (item 1) and avoiding ethnic and social conflicts (item 2) were viewed similarly by both questionnaire and interview participants with high overall disagreements, indicating that neither of them formed a strong factor in affecting students' motivation to study abroad. Moreover, in terms immigration plans (item 3), data relating to the questionnaire survey was slightly over half, whereas during the interview process, no one mentioned about the future immigration plan. The quantitative findings from Table 4.2 generally support the results of the qualitative interviews, which will be reported in detail in section 4.1.2

#### 4.1.2. Qualitative findings

As shown in Table 4.3, there are a variety of factors that motivates international students to study abroad. They can be divided into three parts: value of the overseas study, personal or family related reasons and financial factors.

Table 4.3 Qualitative information on motivations to study abroad

Categories: Motivations to study abroad	Numbers of Participants
<b>Value of overseas study</b> Be aware of international and cross-cultural perspective To study at a world-class university and expecting advantages from it. Studying abroad as a growing trend	14
<b>Personal or family related reasons</b> To experience a unique experience Previous study, travel or work abroad experience Being influenced or encouraged by friends or families	14
<b>Financial factors</b> Receiving funding from the governments or university scholarship	5

#### *Value of overseas study*

According to King and Sondhi (2018), studying abroad is usually perceived as having additional benefits, especially in certain countries which able to position themselves as a world-class university education. A majority of students (fourteen out of fifteen) in this study

indicated this as their main motivations to pursue overseas education instead of studying in their home country. For instance, a student (001) from Vietnam admitted:

Educational institution in western country is quite salient and I can get international perspective here.

A student from Indonesia (007) described that as she did her undergraduate at home, therefore, receiving master's degree abroad could acquire a global perspective. An India student also stated (008) that the main reason why he decided to study abroad was to receive a critical and international perspective education. In addition, some students also expect to have more interactions with the international students from various countries around the world so as to build international network and experience different cultures. As one Canadian interviewee (013) said:

I did my undergraduate in a very small town, and this is exactly to be upset. So, studying abroad will be very different, I anticipated getting to meet a lot of other international students and I enjoyed it so far.

Besides, a student from India (015) said that building international network is also the significant reason for her decision to study abroad, with the assist of friends from all around the world, she could keep up with the academic information from her friends in different countries, which create more opportunity for her employment as well as future research. In terms of the purpose of studying at a world-class university, 7 students provided in detail during the first stage interview. A student (012) from Thailand claimed that people at his home prefer the degree from abroad than the one in Thailand, it was considered to be more valuable, as it is widely recognised all over the world (interview quotes). Additionally, a student (003) from China mentioned that the universities in her country would prefer to recruit lecturers or researcher who graduated from the foreign universities, as they usually have a higher income and better benefits compared to the others. Another Vietnamese student (011) also agreed that getting a degree abroad helps him a lot with his career development back in Vietnam or anywhere else in the world. Moreover, a Canadian interviewee (013) stated that the overseas education has higher value than the one in his home country, it looks good for the CV. Similarly, a student (004) from Japan mentioned:

I would like to study in the top two hundred university in the world, especially in the English-speaking country, it is better for the career, not only because it is a foreign degree, but also, I can improve my English at the same time.

Furthermore, one Indian participant (015) mentioned that combining an undergraduate degree in her home country with a postgraduate degree abroad is seen as a way of opening the door to an international career.

Studying abroad is considered as a growing and popular trend among some students. In this study, three participants mentioned this point. Two Chinese students (003 and 009) pointed out that pursuing overseas study is a growing trend in their home country recently, especially for ambitious students. Another student from South Africa (010) also agreed that many of the good students in his country intend to study abroad, it is very popular nowadays (interview quotes).

### ***Personal or family related reasons***

The majority of the interview participants in this study mentioned personal or family related reasons. For example, the opportunity for a new and different experience, living in a new place, communicating with people from various culture are all associated with the reasons to study abroad. 9 out of 16 students described that overseas education offered an opportunity for travel and adventure, although within the relatively 'safe' environment of a university setting. A Canadian participant (013) claimed that she was inherently aware that she was migrating to another place with a different culture and was eager to acquire the knowledge with unfamiliar environment. Similarly, an Indonesian student (007) articulated her desire to experience another culture which her father has experienced during his PhD study. Another student from France (002) commented that:

Studying abroad is an opportunity for experiential learning, a new departure as I separate from my family, previous friends and the known environment.

Closely allied to the desire for a unique experience was the factor related to the previous working, or travel experience, for instance, as a Chinese student (009) described

I went to a summer school during my undergraduate degree, I had a great time. I realised that there was something in my life was missing. While travelling in China, I am always travel with my family and friends. But when I study with other people, living, talking hanging out with them every day, I am getting to know their culture. I learn about lives outside of myself. This was a changing point in my thinking that I should go out to study

Similarly, another Chinese participant (006) agreed that his short-term exchange experience in Canada might motivates his decision to pursue an overseas education. Besides, a student from India (008) commented that his previous working experience as an English teacher affects the decision to study abroad.

Influenced or encouragements from others, either family members or friends and colleagues was also associated with the decision to study abroad. More than half of the interviewees agreed that parents' support and expectations motivated them to study abroad. For instance, a student (003) from China stated that Chinese culture emphasis receiving a good education, and her parents' expectations influenced her decision for overseas study (interview quotes). Likewise, a Vietnamese student also pointed out:

Studying abroad can be seen as an investment by my family in order to ensure a successful future for me.

Besides, a participant (013) also acknowledged the support of her boss:

My boss in Canada warmly encouraged me and gave me a lot of good advice.

Three of the interviewees mentioned that their friends who already studied abroad also motivated their decision. One of the interviewees from Vietnam (001) pointed out that the reason why she chose to go abroad is that she wants to be like them instead of falling behind.

### ***Financial factors***

A less frequently mentioned reason was related to financial factors. For example, funding from the government or a previous attended university significantly affected international postgraduates' abilities to study in a foreign country. A scholarship from the current university was also deemed as an essential factor. A Thai student (12) stated that he could encounter financial difficulties without the scholarship from his previous university. In addition, a student from Indonesia (007) also commented that it was the government funding that helped her to make the final decision to study abroad. Moreover, two students (011 and 013) said that the scholarship from the current attracted them to study here instead of other universities.

## **4.2. Motivations to study in the UK**

### **4.2.1. Quantitative findings**

The questionnaire survey in the first stage also includes items related to motivations to study in the UK. Table 4.4 presents the data in relation to the influential factors. The items belonged to a multiple-choice question, and respondents could tick all that applied (see methodology chapter). Overall, 120 participants answered this question. Findings below (see Table 4.4), indicate frequency, valid percentages, and ranking orders. These results will be compared with the interview data as well on the same topic (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.4 Quantitative information on motivations to study in the UK

Item	Frequency	Valid Percentage	Order
1. Britain's rich history.	90	75	4
2. A shorter geographical distance between my home country and Britain.	30	25	11
3. A cultural environment that is more similar to my country.	10	8.3	13
4. Special historical or political relations with my home country	20	16.7	12
5. Reputation of the British university	110	91.7	1
6. Worldwide recognized educational degree.	105	87.5	2
7. More choice of the programmes	88	73.3	5
8. A more flexible application schedule, process or procedure.	80	66.7	6
9. Shorter period for study or degree completion.	98	81.7	3
10. Lower tuition fees than other destinations.	70	58.3	8
11. Influence from others	72	60	7
12. Have relatives in the UK	50	41.7	10
13. My plan to stay or work in the UK after graduation.	60	50	9

According to the results from Table 4.5, all the items in this question are divided into three categories, based on the findings from the first stage qualitative interviews so as to draw a comparison. The categories include (1) geographical and cultural factors, (2) advantages of UK higher education as well as (3) personal or family related reasons (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Three categories of questionnaire items on motivations to study in the UK

Category	Item
Geographical and cultural factors	1, 2, 3 and 4
Advantages of UK higher education	5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10
Personal or family related reasons	11, 12 and 13

In relation to geographical and cultural factors, items 1 and 2 in the questionnaire survey strongly support the qualitative interview findings, except for item 3. Based on the findings from first stage interviews (see Table 4.6), thirteen out of sixteen interviewees mentioned that in relation to their motivations to study in the UK, geographical and cultural factors played significant roles. Among them, four for geographical factors, seven for cultural reasons and two historical reasons. According to the data from the questionnaires (see Table 4.4), Britain's rich history (item 1) was ranked fourth, which is the highest among the first category. Approximately one fifth of the participants chose item 2 (a shorter geographical distance between home country and Britain) as a factor which motivated them to study in the UK. However, the response rate for items 3 (similarity in cultural environment) and 4 (special historical or political relations) were very low, which is similar to the interview findings.

In terms of advantages of the UK higher education system, some of the quantitative data provides the same results which could support the interview results (see section 4.2.2.) in the first stage. For instance, nearly all the interview participants admitted that high quality and perceived reputation of the British education were factors which affected their decision to study in the UK. Similarly, above 90 percent of the students in the questionnaire chose items 5 (reputation) and item 6 (worldwide recognised degree), ranking them the highest and second highest among all the factors. In addition, more than three quarters of the students prefer the shorter period for study or degree completion (item 9) in the UK, and 8 of the participants during the interviews mentioned this point. Moreover, regarding the reasons related to a more flexible application process (item 8), 6 of the interviewees viewed it as a factor for British education, which ranked the eighth in the questionnaire survey. However, in relation to some other factor, the quantitative findings differed somewhat from the qualitative findings. For instance, the variety of the programmes (item 7), which nearly 73.3 percent of the students identified as an influential factor, whereas only four interview participants agreed. Furthermore, as far as the lower tuition fee (item 10) is concerned, both sets of data indicated it a less significant reason.

With regard to personal or family related reasons, quantitative results of item 11 (influence from others) and item 12 (having relatives in the UK), provide different results in supporting the interview findings. During the interviews, all the students gave personal or family related reasons as factors which motivated them to study in the UK (seven for previous study or visiting in the UK, three for family related reasons and eight for suggestions by others), the quantitative findings in Table 4.4. indicated a relative high response rate related to the influence from others, but a very low rate for item 12.

Besides, there are some items which were seldom mentioned during the qualitative interviews, but with moderate response rate in the questionnaire surveys. For instance, item 3 (similar cultural with home country) and 13 (plan to stay or work in the UK after graduation). The quantitative findings general support the qualitative results, which will be presented in the following section (see section 4.2.2).

#### **4.2.2. Qualitative findings**

During the first round of interviews, 16 students mentioned four main categories (see Table 4.6) in relation to motivations to study in the UK, including geographical and cultural factors, advantages of UK higher education as well as personal or family related reasons. The details are described as below:



Table 4.6 Qualitative information on motivations to study in the UK

Categories: Motivations to study in the UK	Numbers of participants
<b>Geographical and cultural factors</b> Geographical factors Cultural factors Historical factors	13
<b>Advantages of UK higher Education</b> High quality and good reputation More chances in selecting the programme Admission process Relative short study period	14
<b>Personal or family related reasons</b> Study or visit in the UK before Family factors Suggestions from others	16

### ***Geographical and cultural factors***

3 of 16 interview participants stated that geographical and cultural factors motivated them to study in the UK. Among them, four students stated that geographical distance between their home country and the UK was one of the reasons why they chose to study in the UK. They were mainly from France, Greece, Canada, and South Africa. As a participant from France (002) stated:

UK is very close to my home, so that I can go back home and visit my parents more often.

A student from South Africa (010) also agreed that the flight distance is shorter which makes him feel not far away from home. Besides, the Canadian student claimed that she decided to study in the UK because the weather was very similar to her hometown, which may aid adjustment to the new environment (interview quotes).

In terms of cultural factors, 7 out of 16 interview participants pointed out related issues. For instance, a Vietnamese (001) student mentioned that she was impressed by the UK's history and culture, and she liked the country with long history. As a Chinese student (006) said:

I decided to study in the UK because I met many British people during the undergraduate, I was introduced to the British culture, and I want to go deeper.

Another Indian student (008) agreed that while watching some British movies, he was shocked by its rich history and want to come and check it out.

In addition, special historical or political relations with their home country also motivate the participants to study in the UK. For instance, a student from America (014) mention that as one of the oldest sovereign nations, the UK had a significant influence on the cultural practices and traditions across the world, including her home count- the US. It would make her feel comfortable and familiar while studying here. Another Indian student agreed that:

My country has a strong relationship with the UK, it is also a member of British Commonwealth, which gives us more opportunity to study in the UK.

### ***Advantages of UK higher Education***

Fourteen out of fifteen international students during the interviews pointed out the high quality, reputation, and prestige of British education also relevant to their decision-making process. For instance, an interviewee from Japan (004) said that higher Education in the UK and its qualifications have remarkable international reputation, the UK degree is recognised by global universities and top companies, which provides huge opportunities for the future career development. Moreover, a Chinese participant (003) stated that UK universities have featured strongly in world rankings, and she would like to study in the top 200 university in the world. Another Chinese student (009) also commented: ‘I decided to study here because it is the centre of my knowledge in my field and the university in the UK have good reputations. Besides, a Greek student (016) indicated that a UK degree would help for her PhD applications in other countries or finding a job.

Additionally, more choice of the programmes might also influence students’ decision to pursuing education in the UK. A Vietnamese student (005) mentioned that the university in the UK offered a wide choice in selecting her field of study compared to her home country. Similarly, a Thai student (012) commented

I was impressed with the course, in my home country, it doesn’t have the programme like it. It is really my dream course.

Besides, an Indonesia participant (007) also mentioned that there were a variety of universities and more courses in the UK, which attracted her to study (interview quotes).

Similarly, one Indian student (015) pointed out that she chose to study here because it was a degree that wasn’t there in India.

Besides, six out of sixteen students agreed that issues related to admission process might also affect their decision to study in the UK. The exemption from language exam was one of the reasons. Four interviewees mentioned this point. An interviewee from South Africa (010) said that English is the official language in his home country, therefore, he does not need to attend any English language test. Also, a Vietnamese student agreed:

I did my bachelor's degree in Australia, and I do not need to attend the IELTS test again, this is the reason why I chose to study in the UK.

In addition, the relatively simple application process compared to the US also motivate them to study in the UK. For instance, a participant from China (006) mentioned that he did not want to spend time in the preparation for the GRE<sup>1</sup> or GMAT<sup>2</sup> exam, because time was tight. Furthermore, eight interviewees indicated that the relatively short study period influenced their decisions to study in the UK instead of other countries. On the one hand, the comparatively shorter duration of the master's programmes helped reduce both tuition fees and the cost of living. For instance, an interviewee from China (006) stated that he planned to study in the America at first, but it needs two years to complete. It costs a large sum of money and it is hard for him to afford. A Vietnamese student (011) also agreed that the short duration of study in the UK helped him to reduce the financial pressures and could have more time to focus on the study as well as live a better life. Additionally, a student from Japan (004) also admitted:

It is more expensive to study in the other English-speaking countries.

On the other hand, studying in the UK was viewed time saving. An Indian student (015) said that a master in India needs up to two years while UK masters have shorter length of one year, it is saved of time. Besides, a Chinese student (009) claimed that the one-year postgraduate master programme gave her an early entry into the job market, enable her to more chances to find a good job.'

### ***Personal or family related reasons***

All the students stated that personal or family related reasons were associated with their choice to study in the UK. Previous study or visit experience in the UK, whether long or short, influenced their decisions. Seven interview participants admitted this point. As one of the Chinese students (009) indicated that she attended summer school in the UK before, it was an experience to see whether it was suitable for her to do the master here. An Indonesia interviewee (007) also mentioned:

I've been to the UK for a couple of days for my sister's graduation, it is a nice country and I want to study here.

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<sup>1</sup> GRE is abbreviation for Graduate Record Examinations

<sup>2</sup> GMAT is abbreviation for Graduate Management Admission Test

In addition, family related reasons could also be a reason for pursuing UK education. Three students mentioned that the reason why they chose the UK as a destination was because they have relatives here. An Indian student claimed that:

I have a lot of relatives in the UK, for me, the UK is quite like home. I am quite familiar with the environment, the people and the location.

One Chinese participant (006) also said that his uncle was living in the UK, and this would make him feel more secured and gave a sense of belonging.

Another factor influencing decision making were suggestions by others, mentioned by eight students. For instance, a Japanese (004) student stated that:

My mom wants me to go to Australia at first, and I asked one of my friends who studied in the UK, and she introduced the educational system to me, I think it really suits me and then I decided to study in the UK.

Similarly, an Indonesian interview participant (007) indicated that both her parents were lecturers in the university, they joined many courses abroad, and suggested her to study in the UK. Besides, an Indian (015) student also agreed that the decision was influenced by the advice from her sister and friends who used to study in the UK.

### **4.3. Preparations for studying in the UK**

This section aims to discuss when did the interview participants make the decision to study abroad, how long did they prepare for it and whether it was influenced by others. In addition, it also investigates whether the students applied to other universities and why they decided to choose the current university in the end.

#### **4.3.1. Preparation period**

The preparation duration was different according to different people. The majority of the participants agreed that the application process didn't take a long time, whereas the preparation took a long time. The difficulties the students experienced during their formal preparation for study abroad were related to the cost of the programmes, English language test as well as the information relevant to the host country. For instance, a student (011) from Vietnam said that he deferred his offer due the financial reasons. Both tuition fees and living expenses in the UK were high, therefore, he worked one more year to earn sufficient money to sustain himself. Similarly, another Indonesian student admitted:

I deferred the offer due to the application for the scholarship, it was really a complicated process, but luckily, I got it this year.

Regarding the preparation for the English language test, two Chinese participant (003) and 006) mentioned:

I studied Spanish during the bachelor's degree, my English was not good enough to apply a university in the UK, therefore, I spend nearly two years to prepare for the IELTS test, and finally got overall 7. It was tough, but I learned a lot.

I received the conditional offer in March this year and the IELTS score was the only condition. I didn't want to delay the admission or attend the pre-sessional class; I joined the trainings courses instead and finally achieve it.

Moreover, a student from Japan (004) pointed out that culture issues were the things that she prepared, as the culture in the UK was quite different from what she experienced in Japan.

#### **4.3.2. Determine process**

The findings in this section are relevant to the issue whether their final decisions to pursue overseas study were affected by others. Ten out of sixteen interview participants admitted that it was influenced by the people around, for instance, family members, teachers, and friends with study-abroad experience or colleagues. An India student (015) committed:

One of the lecturers in my undergraduate degree was doing her PhD degree in the UK, she is knowledgeable and elegant, I want to be like her, and this is the reason why I chose to study here.

An interviewee from South Africa (010) also commented that his parents encouraged and support his to study in the UK. Additionally, an India student (008) agreed:

My cousin used to study in the UK, one-year life abroad helps him improve a lot, not only for the life skills, but also the ability to communicate with others, he speaks good English and has friends all around the world. I was jealous of him and looking forward to that valuable experience.

However, the other small part of the students made the decision to study abroad by themselves. One of the Vietnamese students (011) stated that it was his own choice for the overseas education, my life will be enhanced by the experiences and aspirations and it is the realization of the self-value (interview quotes).

#### **4.4. Expectations for studying in the UK**

The data related to the expectations for studying in the UK was collected within three months of students' arrival in the UK (the first stage interview), including their first impression about

the UK, and their expectations before and after living here for a short time. The findings focus on both academic and sociocultural expectations.

#### **4.4.1. First impressions about the UK**

This section aims at exploring the international students' first impression about the UK while arriving here and living in the host environment for a short period of time. Many of the participants started this topic by making comparisons. The initial responses demonstrate the impressions of the participants from a variety of countries and cultural backgrounds. For instance, a Vietnamese student (005) mentioned that the most obvious difference between the UK and Vietnam was the language, there were not only British English or American English that she learnt. But various types of the accents, and sometimes it was difficult to understand. Additionally, another student from Vietnam (001) stated:

One thing that impressed me most is the weather. It is totally different from my home country, the weather here is like a woman's mood, constantly changing and hard to predict.

Besides, a Chinese interviewee (006) claimed:

The thing which is shocked me most is the rhythm of people's life is quite slow compared to China, I still remember when I first arrive here, it was a Sunday, I went to Tesco with my friend, we were told that it would close at 5pm, I was surprised about that. In China, all the stores open even longer during the weekends.

Similarly, another Chinese participant (006) described her first impression about the UK according to the environment, it was beautiful and peaceful, really amazing and attractive, which was different from his home country.

Moreover, some of the students who have travelled to the UK before, described their first impression from their first visit. As a student from India (015) claimed:

My first impression about the UK was the time when I attended my sister's graduation ceremony. I felt that everything here was clean and well organized.

Besides, some of the participants mentioned that their first impressions about the UK were quite different from what they had imagined. For example, a student from Japan (004) stated that unlike what he saw from some social media or TV programmes that British people are reserved, but while arriving here, he found that they were friendly and talkative. Similarly, a Thai (012) participant agreed:

People in the UK are very friendly which is opposite to what I have known from social media. I was quite surprised when I first went to the market to buy some food, while I am checking out, the cashier just said, have a nice day. It's very warm.

Although the majority of the interview participants held positive opinions about their first impressions, there were some fewer positive impressions, for instance, relatively expensive living fees and student ratio of each country. As an Indian student (008) mentioned that the exchange rate for British pound is high, and the food, household items were much more expensive compared to his home country. In addition, a Chinese participant (003) said:

Before coming here, I expected to have more local classmates, however, majority of them are international students, and many are from China. Sometimes I am wondering I am still in China.

#### **4.4.2. Expectations before and after arriving at the UK**

This section mainly focuses on the participants' initial expectations regarding both academic and sociocultural experiences and whether their expectations were met after they had been living in the host environment for a while. Overall, students were positive about their higher education experiences. The findings are as follows:

##### ***The expectations before coming to the UK***

In terms of the initial expectations, most of the interview participants related it to the academic experiences. Some of their expectations focused on their personal development while others paid more attention to the course or the teaching styles. For instance, a student from Vietnam (001) mentioned that she expected to speak more, to be more confident to share her opinion and hope it could be hearing and receiving by others seriously. A student from France (002) also stated:

Before I came here, I am well prepared. I know I have to study a lot, getting to read a lot, which is something I am lazy to do when I was in my home country.

An Indian participant (008) also pointed out that he preferred the different atmosphere in terms of academic life. In addition, a Chinese interviewee (009) said that before she came to the UK, she expected that the teachers could consider students' language as well as culture backgrounds during the class, which would help her to adjust to the new learning environment easily.

Besides, some of the students had expectations related to sociocultural experience. Among them, having more interactions with the local students and other international students was the

most frequently mentioned issue. As a South Africa participant 010 stated that he did the undergraduate in a very small college at a very small town, therefore, after making decision to study in the UK, he hopes to meet a lot of other international students and experience different culture. Another participant from Indonesia (007) also mentioned

I expected to have more opportunities to interact with the local students in order to be more local and speak more fluently in English.

Moreover, a few interviewees mentioned that they didn't have any expectations before arrival, they were waiting to see what the life would be like in the UK, and all the encounters could be surprises.

### ***The expectations after coming to the UK***

The students' expectations may change or stay the same after arrival. In terms of academic expectation, many of them remained the same. For instance, one Vietnamese student (001) remarked she still had the same expectations in academic study as it was the first time for her to study in the UK. Another student from Vietnam (005) also admitted:

My expectation now is still to have good grades and perform well in order to make a preparation for the further PhD application.

Besides, student (014) agreed that her expectations remain the same, because she studied the same programme.

Other interviewees had different ideas about their expectations. Some of the students mentioned that what they got from the academic experience was beyond what they had expected. For example, a Greek student (016) stated that she didn't expect to have personal tutors and seminars, which offered her a chance to talk about her own problems with the staffs and discuss the topic in detail with others. Moreover, another student (012) also agreed that she never expected that the library system was so perfect, she could find all she needs through the library website, and she didn't expect that the library support service could help her with the academic writing as well (interview quotes). A few said that expectations changed after they experienced something unexpected. For instance, a Japanese student (004) claimed:

It is different comparing with my expectation, I experienced culture shock during the lecture. I have been living in the UK for more than one month. Maybe I experienced like honeymoon period, and it is the first experience of me about culture shock, which really makes me feel depressed.

Furthermore, some other students held the opinion that their expectations increased after living here for a while. A Vietnamese interviewee (011) mentioned that his aim before



coming here was to complete the degree successfully and then go back to his home country to find a job, however, he changed his mind as he realized that he was interested in academic work, thus, plans to pursue further education.

#### **4.4.3. Expectations for future experiences**

Regarding the future expectations, findings can be categorized in two domains: academic expectations as well as sociocultural expectations, which will be discussed separately in this section.

##### ***Future expectations in relation to academic experience***

Taking future academic expectations into consideration, the interview participants were mainly concerned about two points, their personal achievement in the academic context and their expectations of others, such as, the lecturer, classmates, or the support services of the university.

Nearly all the student during the interviews mentioned that they expected their further academic experience would get better as time went by. As a student from China (006) claimed:

I expect to work independently and carry a research independently, I definitely hope that the experience in the following semester could become better and better.

Another Chinese student (009) also listed some personal expectations related to her personal growth and hoped to read more papers, be confident to present opinions and keep up her own subsequent. An Indian student (015) also said about her self-expectation:

I hope I could do well in my master's degree and get a job with it.

In addition, some of the participants expected that they could solve the problems relevant to language ability and critical thinking/writing. For instance, a Greek student (016) stated:

I expect to improve my ability in academic writing, and some skills and knowledge which related to my own field.

A Chinese student (003) also claimed that she hoped to enhance her English language ability and critical thinking skills in the future study.

Moreover, an interviewee from Vietnam (005) commented on her expectations about the modules, and she said that she preferred to have more seminars in the future, because in seminars, she could read beforehand and discuss what they have known and what they

haven't known to each other and exchanged information. A student from Indonesia also mentioned:

I hope that the teachers could understand our limitations and provide some specific suggestions.

### ***Future expectations in relation to sociocultural experience***

This section aims to investigate what interviewees' expectations were for their future sociocultural experiences. Most of the participants had positive attitudes towards their future sociocultural experience. These expectations included knowing and adjusting to the British culture, getting involved in more activities as well as building friendships with the locals and other international students. For example, a student from South Africa (010) stated that he hoped to meet more people, especially the locals, and to know their culture. A Chinese student (006) said that he wanted to know more and have a better experience about the British culture:

I want to join the local societies and interact with the British people so as to understand the culture deeply.

A participant from Vietnam (011) also pointed out that he I expected to meet more people, learn more about their culture and habits, and to find the difference between his culture and the others.

However, a few students admitted that they did not care that much about how their sociocultural experience would be like in the future, because they focus more on the academic study and lack of time to meet others. For instance, a Chinese student (009) mentioned:

If I were eighteen, I would be willing to make more friends, but in my age, I just focusing on the academic, and don't want to waste of time in social.

Additionally, a student from France (002) who used to study in the Southern part of the UK during her undergraduate said she didn't have any further expectations because she was quite familiar with the culture and everything here.

### **4.5. Future plans after overseas study**

As future plan after studying abroad might be an essential factor for the international students' motivation to study in the UK, therefore, the relevant information is interpreted here.

According to the first stage interviews, students' future plans could be categorized as academic plans as well as career plans. Three students said that they plan to pursue further PhD study, and another two students mentioned that they plan to work in the academic area.

For instance, as a Chinese student (009) claimed that she was thinking about going to another country to continue my PhD study. A Vietnam (005) interviewee also mentioned:

I am thinking of turning back to Vietnam, working as a lecturer at the university before making further plan for gaining PhD degree.

In addition, previous working experience also influenced their plans. A student from Indonesia (007) admitted:

I used to be a teaching assistant in my country, so after finishing the programme, I have to go back to my home country to work for several years. I will work as a researcher and also, I will find an opportunity to do my PhD.

Similarly, another Canadian participant (013) stated she was still employed by the company which she used to work, therefore, after completing the programme, she planned to go back and worked at that company.

For those who plan to pursue a non-academic career, most of them hoped that they could find a job which is relevant to their current programme. Some of them were planning to back to their home countries whereas others wanted to seek working opportunities in the UK or the other countries. A Chinese interview participant (006) mentioned:

I study media here, so I want to go back to China in some big cities, such as Shanghai or Hong Kong, as the cultural industries in those big cities are developed and I can learn more there, getting valuable and practical experience at the same time.

Additionally, a student from Vietnam (001) said that she planned to apply for some internship in western countries or preferred to work for two or three years and then went back to her home country. While talking about working in the UK, a Japanese student (004) stated:

I have little knowledge about staying or working in the UK, and I don't have enough time to do so. But if I have a chance, I will have a try.

Moreover, another Vietnamese student (011) said that he plans to work in another country, such as South Korea after the graduation, to work there and live there. But if the things didn't go as the plan, probably he would go back to Vietnam.

#### **4.6. Whether to choose to study at the current university again**

Based on the interview findings, most of the students admitted that they would still choose to study in the current university. This university was preferred by the international students mainly related to the location of the campus, the high reputation of the program, its facilities and services, and the financial issues. The most frequently mentioned issue was related to its

location, with perfect surrounding facilities, such as metro and bus stations, supermarkets, and shopping malls, making their lives much more comfortable. Also, some students talked about its peaceful environment:

I would still choose to study at this university. It is not a tourist city, which provides us with a relatively quiet environment, although the campus is located in the city centre (003, China).

Besides, some interviewees said the reason why they would still choose to study in this university was because of its unique and high-quality programs:

It is the only one that offered an integrated program in the UK. It is also ranked top in that area. I would suggest my friends in my home country study here (011, Vietnam).

Moreover, half of the students revealed that the benefits of social activities and university facilities, was another influential factor which would attract them to study again in this university:

I think this university is perfect for both research and social. It provides us with all kinds of societies and offers academic support (014, America).

Furthermore, two interviewees mentioned the scholarship provided by the university was also a significant reason for the study in this university again:

The university offered me scholarships. Although it was not a lot, it still helps me reduce financial stress (011, Vietnam).

Although the overwhelming majority of the international students agreed they would still choose to study in the university if given a chance again. However, 3 out of 16 interviewees had an opposite opinion and said they would not choose to look at the current university anymore. Two of them admitted that it not because they were not satisfied with the current one. They want to find the most suitable one and the most exciting program, by making comparisons among all the available universities instead of making any hasty decision.

Whereas another student thought that she prefers a university with smaller classrooms:

I would make a comprehensive evaluation before I accept the offer, such as the module information, teaching quality, and its complexity. I would find a more program I am interested in and good at (009, China).

I want to go to a university with a smaller class size. Therefore, I could have a better interaction and involvement (005, Vietnam).

Interestingly, one interviewee reflected that if given him a chance again, he would still choose to study here as he likes the city and the university, but in any other program:

If I have another chance, I will choose another program with fewer Chinese students to experience something different (006, China).

#### **4.7. Advantages of studying abroad**

This section aims at investigating the advantages of pursuing overseas studies from both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews.

##### **4.7.1. Quantitative findings**

The third stage's questionnaire survey includes a multiple-choice question to measure the specific advantages their overseas study provides. It is a multiple-choice question as any participants can choose more than one item listed below. The findings are presented below, including frequency, percentage, and ranking.

Table 4.7 Quantitative findings on advantages for pursuing overseas education

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Order</b>
1. Academic abilities	90	88.2%	1
2. English language abilities	60	58.8%	8
3. Professional abilities	80	78.4%	3
4. Critical thinking skills	62	60.8%	7
5. Future employment opportunities	69	67.6%	6
6. World/Global view	85	83.3%	2
7. Independence	78	76.5%	4
8. International social network (connection/friendship/ relationship with others)	75	73.5%	5

According to the quantitative data from Table 4.7, most international students agreed that their overseas study experience benefited their academic abilities (88.2%), ranked as the top benefits. Besides, their study abroad experiences also beneficial to the areas such as world/global view (83.3%), professional abilities (78.4%), independence (76.5%), international social network (73.5%), future employment (67.6%). Above half of the international students mentioned improving their English language ability (58.8%), although it was the least mentioned factor. The quantitative findings from Table 4.7 generally support the results of the qualitative interviews, which will be presented in section 4.7.2.

#### 4.7.2. Qualitative findings

Based on the third stage interviews' conclusions, international students tend to say more about the advantages of pursuing overseas study rather than disadvantages. These advantages including, improving English language ability, gaining new living experiences or academic degrees, and becoming independent.

As presented in Table 4.8, various advantages were mentioned by the participants during the interviews. They could be divided into five categories, such as academic improvement, self-improvement, different perspectives and cultures, employment opportunities, and better education experience. The findings described as follows:

Table 4.8 Qualitative findings on advantages of pursuing overseas study

Category/Theme	Numbers of participants
<b>Academic improvement</b> Improving English language ability Improving knowledge in research and subjects Experience different teaching/learning style	16
<b>Self-improvement</b> Enhancing social network Developing confidence Travelling to new places	15
<b>Acquiring different perspectives or cultures</b> Experiencing different cultures Experiencing international perspectives	14
<b>Opportunities for employment</b> Expecting employment benefits. Discovering career opportunities abroad	11

##### *Academic improvement*

According to the interview findings, all the participants stated that studying abroad improved their academic abilities and helped them experience different teaching and learning styles. Among these students, five students deemed the improvement of their English language ability as an advantage. In such an English-speaking environment, these students had to practice it regularly. They learned some conversational phrases and expressions, which enable them to speak like a local. It might also benefit for their future job application:

Studying abroad provides me the chance to hone my language skills. It is an entirely different experience to apply the language we learn to the real world (007, Indonesia)

The overseas study experience benefits me a lot. The fluency in English speaking will help me in my future career, mainly when I apply for a job in organizations with a global or multinational presence (001, Vietnam).

Additionally, 14 out of 16 interviewees admitted that the knowledge improved in research and their own subjects' field was another advantage for overseas education. Some of them acknowledged that their teachers usually neglect it in their home country, whereas they made significant progress in conducting their research in the UK. Several students also emphasized the improvement in their academic knowledge:

I learned a lot through various modules and became more professional in this field (002, France).

Moreover, experiencing different teaching and learning style was also mentioned as an advantage for studying abroad. A student noted that although adjust to a different teaching style was tough, it still helped him to broaden his horizon and benefited his learning:

Pursuing overseas study helped me expand my academic horizon and develop a capacity to adapt to various teaching settings (012, Thailand).

### ***Self-improvement***

15 out of 16 participants during the interviews revealed that studying abroad was beneficial to international students' self-improvement. Among the fifteen students, eleven of them mentioned that their studying abroad experience benefited their independence, self-confidence, and social networks. Although studying abroad is sometimes challengeable, the difficulties they met enable them to develop valuable life skills and help to become a more independent and mature person:

Study abroad forced me to be independent and not rely on the support of the family. I arranged everything and coped with the difficulties by myself, which profoundly impacted my mental maturity (005, Vietnam).

Living and studying in a new country on my own gave me a sense of independence (007, Indonesia).

In terms of self-confidence, several participants agreed that overseas education allowed them to confront any difficulties and made them more confident. From learning how to use public transport to shopping in English, the process helped them to realize how capable they were and made them feel more confident:

It helped me to gain more confidence by improving some specific skills, such as cross-cultural awareness or communication skills (003, China).

Among these fifteen, ten interview participants admitted that social network was another advantage for pursuing overseas educations. Some students agreed that making friends while studying abroad was easier than they imagine. The friends they made in the UK would be their lifelong friends. It also helped them to build invaluable relationships with people from all over the world. Sometimes these connections could even lead to their job opportunities:

I've made many new friends throughout the year. Some of them would remain lifelong friends (011, Vietnam).

My international connections were broadening as I had the opportunity to meet people who could turn into life-long friends. Besides, one of my local friends introduced me to a part-time job last semester (013, Canada).

Moreover, several participants mentioned the advantages of traveling to different places as an obvious benefit of pursuing overseas study. Studying abroad allowed them to see the world and travel to many new areas which they may not have the chance to visit otherwise. They also found that it was much easier to travel to other countries. With various travel deals and international budget, exploring the world seemed to be more affordable:

I could go sightseeing in which I study and know it better. Besides, I also traveled to the neighboring regions, such as Edinburgh or York (014, America).

I am the kind of person who genuinely loves travel. The significant advantage for me to study overseas is that I could travel to the surrounding countries during weekends or holidays instead of limited to one place (015, India).

### ***Acquiring different perspectives and cultures***

Acquiring different perspectives or cultures was the view as another advantage. By pursuing overseas studies and living in a foreign country for an extended period, their international perspectives and cross-cultural awareness were developed in a way that was visiting for a week or two cannot. These new perspectives and different cultures have lasting impacts on their way of life and allowed them to have a better world view. After studying abroad, they felt more comfortable interacting with people from various backgrounds. They learned from their unique experiences and established a stronger relationship with them.



One of the advantages is receiving many cultural perspectives, which help me look at things in a brand-new way. It is also an excellent way to experience another culture, as I could have enough time to live here and immerse myself in it (012, Thailand).

### ***Opportunities for employment***

11 out of 16 international students mentioned that overseas study benefited their future employment during the interview, as the international experience is incredibly desired in the current job market. The findings also revealed that in some countries, the students with study abroad experience would have more chance of a better job and emphasized the importance of fluency in English in the job market. Therefore, it would be competitive if the students could receive overseas education in the UK:

In my home country, the students with overseas study experience would be much easier to find good jobs (009, China).

Fluency in English-speaking is significant in finding a job, especially in those internationalized or multinational companies. Studying in the UK and involving in the local environment helped with my English language ability (001, Vietnam).

Additionally, several participants emphasized the importance of receiving a foreign degree as one advantage of overseas education.

Having a well-recognized degree in the UK or other foreign countries is advantageous in my future employment or promotion (003, China).

Besides, pursuing an overseas study, especially in the area in which they are interested, provide them with the chance to add relevant experience and skills to the CV. A degree from a British university would be valuable after back to their home country:

When the employer looks at my CV and finds that I have studied abroad, they might think that I am a well-traveled individual equipped with global perspectives (011, Vietnam).

Moreover, two participants from America (014) and Greece (016) agreed that pursuing overseas study would help them to find a host country job:

The local university's degree was competitive in applying for a job in the UK (014, America).

### **4.8. Disadvantages for studying abroad**

As shown in Table 4.9, some disadvantages are from pursuing overseas study, which could be categorized into three main categories: personal disadvantages, financial issues, and cultural and psychological problems. The results are presented as follows:

Table 4.9 Qualitative findings on disadvantages for pursuing overseas studies

Category/Theme	Numbers of participants
<b>Personal disadvantages</b>	16
Experiencing language and communication barriers	
Dealing difficulties on their own	
High expectations	
Absence of domestic network	
Employment opportunity	
<b>Cultural or emotional factors</b>	15
Experiencing culture difference	
Experiencing emotional adjustment	
<b>High costs</b>	9

### *Personal disadvantages*

All the interview participants agreed that some personal factors would be the disadvantages of language and communication barriers, dealing with difficulties on their own, high expectations, absence of a domestic network, and employment opportunities.

For example, some students said that they might initially have some problems with languages while reading or writing:

Imperfect English language ability would sometimes be the disadvantages, especially while writing assignments or preparing presentations, which largely affected my academic performance (006, China).

Additionally, communication is considered as another significant hurdle of pursuing overseas study. Sometimes the students might not understand what the teachers said and felt depressed. As the students were from different cultural backgrounds, the possibilities for miscommunication and misunderstanding were enormous. Interestingly, most of the students said they chose to study in the UK because of its one-year program during the first stage survey. However, after nine months, several participants changed their opinion and regarded it as a disadvantage. Several students admitted that they found that a two-year master's program would be much better throughout these days. If so, there was no rush, and they had enough time to adjust to the academic and social environment, but more space in between things, instead of cramming them together all the time:

Comparing with other countries, such as America or Canada, UK's one-year program is relatively short. In the beginning, I think it would save a lot of time. However, haste makes waste. I need to learn a lot and keep moving every day. Sometimes I don't even have enough time to review it, let alone enjoy my life here (004, Japanese).

Besides, dealing with difficulties on their own was deemed as personal related disadvantages as well. For instance, most students never had the experience to live independently or travel outside of their home country. Therefore, studying abroad offered them a chance to experience certain degrees of independence for the very first time. Students tend to suffer a lot as they couldn't get help immediately when they in need.

I realized that I no longer have my friends with me, it was unable for me to receive timely help, and I must do everything on my own (014, America).

Some participants also mentioned high expectations from societies and people around to those who graduated abroad.

The high expectations from our society and other people sometimes turned out to be a pressure and may make us outperformed than really what we can (001, Vietnam).

Moreover, several international students also mentioned the absence of a domestic network as a disadvantage. They built global networks since they came here and spent a long time with their new friends, and lacking topics and communications with their old friends:

As time went by, both a professional and personal network in my home country was lost.

While backing home, it would be a disadvantage compared with those who did their master's degree at home (012, Thailand).

Furthermore, employment opportunities while returning to their home country was another concern. 2 out of 16 interviewees admitted that although getting a degree in a foreign country seemed to be easy to find jobs in some so-called international countries or cities. However, it is quite tricky to seek a job back in some small towns, such as their hometown.

My parents hoped that I could back to my hometown, find a job and settle down. A foreign degree alone is not competitive enough as personal relationships and networks are more critical in those small cities (006, China).

### ***Cultural or emotional factors***

According to the interview results, 15 out of 16 participants mentioned that the emotional or cultural issue was a disadvantage. Some international students revealed that staying in a new country would be challenging, even if they were fully prepared. They found themselves jolted or shocked by suddenly shifting to a new culture. Everything seemed to be different from their home country, from food to transportation systems and religious practices.

The different and unfamiliar culture has deemed another disadvantage, leading to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and homesickness (005, Vietnam).

Living abroad is not like living in the home country. There are differences, especially culture. If the students were not well prepared to cope with these differences, they would suffer considerable stress (012, Thailand).

Additionally, among the participants, ten indicated that psychological issues such as homesickness were another disadvantage. While going to another country and experiencing many new things, the students would inevitably miss home more or less. For instance, some of them revealed that not all the participants could concentrate on their studies thoroughly when studying abroad. The new environment and people around would cause homesickness. Due to the unfamiliarity, some tend to choose to stay alone instead of gatherings, which could sometimes affect them. Some participants also admitted that study abroad was challenging, as it is far away from home and in a country that is very different from what they are used to:

The disadvantage is that international students always feel homesick (003, China).

Being halfway around the world made it more challenging to go home for holidays or urgent purposes. Not only did I miss home, but my parents and the rest of the family also found it was hard to adjust to that condition within such a short time (004, Japanese).

### ***High costs***

According to the findings, 9 out of 16 international students mentioned that the high costs were another disadvantage for studying abroad. Both tuition fees and living expenses were much higher compared to their home countries. The house rent, food, travel expenses could be a large amount as well.

I think the only disadvantage is that the cost of the overseas study was expensive, from the course itself to everyday living expenses (010, South Africa).

Apart from the tuition fee, the living costs are more expensive than in some small towns (007, Indonesia).

The high costs could be a disadvantage, as the currency exchange rate was very high between the pound and RMB. Although my parents said nothing, it was still an invisible pressure (009, China).

To sum up, despite the above disadvantages, there are still many more advantages that overcome these (see section 4.7). Pursuing an education in other countries is a wonderful experience overall and could be a fantastic experience for them regardless of these challenges.

#### **4.9. Summary**

The findings for the qualitative interview in relation to international students' motivations to study abroad are categorized in this chapter as (1) value of overseas study, (2) personal or family related reasons and (3) financial factors. More detailed information for studying in the UK are (a) geographical and cultural factors, (b) advantages of UK higher education as well as (c) personal or family related reasons. Most findings from the questionnaire survey were consistent with the interview results, except for some trivial points, such as the purpose of having more freedom, or gaining other life skills. Among the factors, financial factors showed the totally different polarization results in qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires.

The duration of the study-abroad preparation usually varied according to the programme in which the students were enrolled, and their personal situations, including, English language proficiency, background information of the host country as well as the financial factors. Sometimes they deferred their offer due to these reasons. The majority of the participants had made their decisions to pursue overseas study by the influence of others, and they applied to various programmes in different universities. Their final decisions for where to study were affected by the people around them as well.

Regarding the expectations for their studies in the UK, most of the interviewees continued to hold the same academic expectations before and after arrival. However, expectations changed after they experienced something new or unexpected. Generally, most of the participants had good impressions about the UK and had the positive future expectations in both academic and sociocultural experience. Moreover, many of them mentioned that the study-abroad experience would benefit their future plans, both in academic and career terms. This result indicates that the international students had a good start as postgraduate students and were confident to have better experiences. The advantages of pursuing an overseas study found that academic ability improvement was the top-ranked, indicating that international students in this study tried their best and made the most significant efforts on their academic adjustment rather than sociocultural or psychological adjustment. The results from both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaire surveys are consistent with each other. However, the interview data provide a more comprehensive and diverse point regarding the advantages of studying abroad. The subsequent results will be revealed and interpreted in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5. Findings: Academic adjustment

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, academic adjustment is an adaptive process of how international students fit into an educational environment (see Chapter 2). This chapter reports the results regarding the international students' three waves of adjustment experiences (at the beginning of their study, five months into their program, and the end of their taught period) at a British university, based on the data collected from both semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire surveys. It explores the academic process over time from the students' perspectives and measures how they performed on their programs.

Sixteen students took part in each stage of interviews, and there are respectively 120, 108 as well as 102 respondents in the online questionnaire survey through three waves. Findings are presented below: Firstly, academic adjustment experiences in each stage are interpreted (5.1), following by the academic difficulties (5.2), coping with academic difficulties (5.3), evaluation of academic satisfactions (5.4), and overview on academic adjustment (5.5). The chapter ends with a summary (5.6).

### 5.1. Academic adjustment experiences in each stage

#### 5.1.1. Quantitative findings

The questionnaire surveys in each stage included a question related to their academic experience so far. A six-point Likert-type scale was used for the agreement scale. Scores of each item range from one (completely disagree) to six (completely agree). Findings are presented as follows:

Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics on the academic experiences in each stage

Item	Mean		
	T1	T2	T3
1. I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date.	3.75	3.44	4.73
2. I am enjoying the lifestyle of being a university student	4.59	3.33	4.23
3. I am satisfied with my academic abilities/ skills of being a student.	3.63	3.22	3.95
4. I am satisfied with the academic resources at the university.	4.95	4.95	4.93
5. I think I am underestimating the difficulties I might face with.	4.47	4.48	3.71
6. I am confident of my English ability for my academic work.	3.72	3.41	3.75
7. I like the teaching styles, or the way teachers' guide in the UK.	4.15	4.14	4.21
8. I sometimes feel as though my education is not worth time away from my work or my family.	2.25	2.01	2.01
9. I believe that everything will become better as time goes by.	5.18	5.02	5.12

According to the findings from Table 5.1, the mean score for the level of academic performance in the first stage (T1) was 3.75. A total of 70 (58.3%) participants agreed in different levels (from slightly agree to completely agree) that they were satisfied with their current academic performance. In addition, a majority of the students strongly agreed that they were enjoying the lifestyle of being a university student ( $M=4.59$ ) and didn't feel that their education is not worth the time away from their work or family ( $M=2.25$ ), even if they face different degrees of issues with specific experiences, such as their academic abilities ( $M=3.63$ ) as well as English language abilities ( $M=3.72$ ), which was similar to the previous interview findings (see section 5.1.1).

The two items that rate most highly were those related to academic resources as well as future expectations. Among them, item 9 is the most significant one, with the highest mean score of 5.18, indicating that although the students may encounter some academic issues more or less, they believed that everything would become better as time goes by. In terms of academic resources ( $M=4.95$ ), all the students held positive attitudes towards it. Many of them even felt completely satisfied. Another item that positively and directly supports the qualitative findings (see Table 5.1) underestimated the difficulties they might be faced with ( $M=4.47$ ). They admitted that their academic experience seemed to be even more complicated than what they expected.

In terms of the second stage (T2) questionnaire survey findings, the mean score for international students' academic performance was 3.44. There were half of the participants reported they were not very satisfied with their academic performance to date. Compared with the previous stage, the satisfaction of enjoying the lifestyle of being a university student ( $M=3.33$ ), their academic abilities ( $M=3.22$ ), and the confidence of English language ability ( $M=3.41$ ) reduced, whereas the number of students who agreed with the underestimation of the academic difficulties ( $M=4.48$ ) increased. Interestingly, although the students were not very satisfied with their academic experience as the previous one, most of the students still held a positive attitude towards their future academic experience and felt satisfied with the academic resources ( $M=4.95$ ). Besides, they didn't think their education was not worth time away from their home or family ( $M=2.01$ ) and believed that everything would become better as time went by ( $M=5.02$ ). These findings were consistent with those from second stage qualitative interviews. During the interviews, most participants also admitted that they encountered many problems with in-depth study and were not satisfied with their academic abilities, such as reading or writing (see section 5.1.2). However, under such a circumstance, most of the interviewees still felt confident with their future academic experience,

According to Table 5.4., the data from the third stage (T3) questionnaire survey suggested that international students were quite satisfied with their academic performance at the end of the taught period, with mean scores of 4.73. Compared with the previous two stages (first and second stages), international students' academic experience improved in various aspects, including academic abilities (M=3.95), enjoying the lifestyle of being university students (M=4.23), and English language abilities (M=3.75), especially in reading and writing. The issue related to underestimating difficulties also reduced a lot. Additionally, findings from both three stages suggested that whether students were satisfied with their academic performance or not, they held positive attitudes towards their future academic experiences and spoke highly of the university's academic resources.

In general, the findings from quantitative questionnaire surveys were in line with each stage of interviews, which will be presented in the following section (see section 5.1.2.)

### **5.1.2. Qualitative findings**

#### ***First stage academic adjustment***

This section pays attention to students' academic experience in the early teaching weeks. During the first interview stage, nearly all the participants only had limited initial study experience in the British university—their comments combined with both negative and positive perspectives. Students' own learning experiences are mainly related to independent study, freedom to choose their topic, preparation before the class, intensive and extensive reading. This section will discuss their early-stage adjustment process in the qualitative phase in detail.

In general, many students expressed uncertainty and lacking confidence in their future academic life but, at the same time, reported high expectations. In the beginning, most students were curious about everything in their academic life, whether in or after class. Everything seemed so fresh. The things that impressed them most were related to classroom discussions or reading materials, and the teachers in the UK always encouraged them to speak more and express their opinions freely during the class:

There are fewer classroom hours, a lot of reading. I appreciate that we have a lot of contact with some of the professors and personal tutors. That's great (013, Canada).

One thing that impressed me is that we can discuss freely. Teachers encouraged us to do so. We do not have the fixed answers for the questions. Instead, diverse ways of thinking and acting are welcomed (012, Thailand).



However, some students said that their early-stage academic experience was less optimistic due to their previous studies' differences. Unlike in their home country, especially those who used to study in a teacher-centered classroom, directly learned from what the teachers taught, memorized things, and then had exams, the emphasis on independent learning was new. Therefore, to catching with others and following the teachers, they needed more time to adjust to the current learning environment, think independently, prepared for the modules, and read the materials in advance:

Things are very different here; I have to do independent learning and broader reading for classes and seminars. While going to the lectures, the teachers would not spoon-feed you the information but help you understand and uncover yourself (005, Vietnam).

There is a big gap between my current study to the previous one. I need to transfer my methodology of learning totally and talk a lot during the seminar. I would get nothing from the discussion without talking to the others. (009, China).

Besides, a few participants using the words 'excited and confident while talking about their prearrival feelings. They felt satisfied rather than scared or nervous initially and thought they were good enough to handle or manage it. However, after several weeks of study, these students admitted that they had underestimated the difficulties they might face and used to be overconfident:

I was overconfident and never thought how difficult it would be without previous learning experience in the Western country and a lack of relevant knowledge in my field. It is tough for me to master different education system and learning skills in such a short time (006, China)

As most of Chinese students applying to universities through agents, overly depend on agents deprived them of the opportunities to have a comprehensive understanding of the education system in the UK:

I applied to the universities via the agents. They helped me a lot. However, I was over-reliance on them, they usually tell me which program is good, but I didn't know much about it and did very little research. I should have made more effort.' (009, China)

Additionally, several interviewees lacked confidence in their future academic studies and had a heavy burden due to language issues. Some of them even stated that their educational experience didn't achieve their expectation. These students pointed out the impact of language difficulties, including struggled to follow lecturers (especially when the teachers use unfamiliar context to illustrate main teaching points) or reading English materials:

The lectures were difficult for me to understand because of the speed (008, India).

Sometimes I cannot keep up with the teacher's pace and still need to review the recap (004, Japanese).

It is the first time for me to read the English materials and difficult for me to remember. Sometimes I have to translate it into my language and then taking notes (006, China).

However, on the other hand, nearly all the interviewees from English-speaking countries or always use English in their daily lives (such as South Africa, Canada, America) found it relatively easy for them to adjust to the new academic environment.

Moreover, other participants commented positively on their academic life and believed that everything would become better as time goes by. Besides, some students spoke highly of the UK's education system, making them feel comfortable and relaxed. They learned a lot throughout these days:

In the beginning, I feel difficult to read a lot within such a short period, but I am surprised to find out that my reading speed increased a lot within these days. I believe it will become better in the future (010, South Africa).

Furthermore, the interview participants who used to study in a quite similar western education system had relatively positive attitudes towards the early-stage academic adjustment experience:

The educational system here is similar to what I used to experience. I went to an American international school and an Australian university in Vietnam (011, Vietnam).

There is not much difference to the one which I used to in America. I didn't spend a long time adjusting to academic life here. It's been pretty good so far. I enjoy it (014, America).

As this stage took place in the early period of their study, these international students could not describe all the aspects of their academic experiences, such as issues related to academic writing and assignments. The comments were related mainly to comparisons between previous academic backgrounds in the countries of origins and their expectations of further study in the UK (see Table 5.2.). According to the findings mentioned above, their first academic adjustment experience could not be categorized as positive or negative. A number of the students were concerned more about future academic life, which indicated their high expectations. Some of them pay more attention to whether they could successfully transfer

into another different academic system and how to improve their language ability. In contrast, others commented positively towards the new academic environment. Overall, students seemed to be quite worried about their current academic performance, especially those from non-English speaking countries, due to a lack of experience and self-doubt

Table 5.2 Comments on academic adjustment in the first interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
Curious about everything in their academic life Believe that everything will become better as time goes by	The emphasis on independent learning Underestimated the difficulties they might face with. Overly depend on agents The language issues, such as following the teachers during the class

### *Second stage academic adjustment*

This stage took place in February, which was at the beginning of their second taught semester. By this time, most of the students had submitted their assignments and were waiting for detailed feedback. They were now five months into their program and could describe their adjustment in specific aspects. Therefore, this section reveals how interviewees' overall adjustment had been since the last interview.

According to the interviews' findings, the international students' academic experience could be categorized as less positive rather than negative. With in-depth study, academic problems emerged. Nearly all the students involved in the interviews reported some academic difficulties. These academic difficulties were depending on their situations and varied across each person.

The findings reveal that 'academic stress' was one of the keywords throughout this period. They had no idea where to start while preparing for the assignments and felt like a frog leaping in the dark. According to the results, the stresses were mainly generated from the overwhelming volume of information in each course. Some of the interviewees found that they received vast numbers of information within such a short period, and they have to handle the demands and selecting optional modules.

It is quite challenging to handle all the given information. I need more time to digest it (002, France).

I attended many lectures and seminars, knowing what differences are, but could not clarify when and how to adjust (007, Indonesia).

However, although some interviewees suffered academic stress in November or December, their optimistic attitudes and abilities to deal with the problems helped them adjust to the new academic environment quickly. Some of them agreed on the effects of keeping calm while having difficulties. The more panicked they were, the more negative results would be:

I was quite busy in November because I have two deadlines: one with 3500 words and another with 3000 words. In the beginning, I felt so anxious, but I told myself that many other students survived. Why couldn't I? Then I adjusted my mood immediately (015, India).

According to the findings, as a time-consuming and stressful process, several students were reported struggling with academic writing in the very beginning due to the issues related to critical thinking or writing and plagiarism. For instance, several students mentioned that they were not entirely familiar with crucial writing initially and spent a long time on its structure and criticality. They even worried about whether they could submit the assignments on time.

I couldn't adapt well these days, everything is critical, and it requires more self-study (008, Indian).

It isn't easy in academic writing. I know I need to write critically, but I always neglect it, maybe because I am not familiar with this kind of writing. (006, China).

Some of them also pointed out the challenges in plagiarisms and felt confused about paraphrasing or quote literature correctly; it was a time-consuming process and needed a lot of effort.

Nearly all the teachers mention the importance of avoiding plagiarism. They also told us how to quote the reference reasonably. Before coming to the UK, I know that plagiarism is a big issue, but I didn't expect it to be so severe (003, China).

It isn't easy to integrate research text into one's style of writing. I can't quote the source directly all the time, and paraphrasing is an essential ability. I need to practice more (004, Japanese).

Moreover, language issues still exist in terms of academic writing. Several students, especially those from Asian countries, such as China or Vietnam, revealed that their biggest challenge was to transition into writing academic English. It wasn't easy to jump the casual day-to-day style to the very high standard of professional English. For them, it was not only the language issue but a cultural shift:

I received traditional grammar and translation English courses in high school, which helped me build a foundation of vocabulary and grammar and get higher scores at school and

international tests. But I have minimal English-speaking experience in my home country, let alone writing academic assignments in English (006, China).

How to write an English academic essay still makes me confused (001, Vietnam).

However, despite the above challenges, some international students could cope better with academic writing at the end of their first semester, owing to their frequent practice.

Interestingly, the similarity in academic systems and background made academic adjustment reasonably easy for those students from America or Canada.

It wasn't very pleasant for me to prepare for the assignment. It costs me a long time. Luckily, as I become more skilled, I found a way to get better (15, India).

It is not difficult to adjust to the academic life here. I am quite familiar with this kind of independent study and academic writing. I know what to do and could arrange the time reasonably (014, America).

Except for these relatively negative experiences, which made them feel stressed or unexpected, there are some positive ones, including the freedom to choose their topics, the relationships with teachers, and classroom involvement. Some students mentioned that unlike in their home countries, where teachers' topics were given directly, teachers would only provide some suggestions in the UK. Their final decisions in choosing the topics were made by themselves.

One thing I want to add is the freedom to choose my topics for the assignments. The teachers gave us a guideline, and we could decide the topic by ourselves. It is flexible. I could choose what I am familiar with or the one I am good at (004, Japan).

Furthermore, considering external factors, students reported some positive adjustment experience, including the relationship with the tutors and the classroom involvement, an interviewee from India (008) mentioned:

One thing that deeply impressed me in UK academic life is my lectures. They enable me to decide what to write in assignments. They gave me suggestions, but it's up to me.

Besides, many interviewees admitted that they appreciate the help from both their teachers and classmates. For example, a student from Vietnam (014) and China (003) indicated:

I appreciate the help from the academic staff. They are accommodating, and they never ignore every student whenever they need help. Moreover, I have a happy relationship with my

classmates, especially those in the same program. I send emails to them when I have any difficulties, and they are helpful.

I always ask the teachers the knowledge in my field, how to write a successful assignment, or whether my assignment's direction is correct. I emailed them the outline, and they always provide me with some excellent suggestions. It helps a lot.

However, 3 out of 16 students indicated some negative points in their relationship with classmates during this stage. For instance, as an Indonesian student (007) and French student (002) said:

I only communicate with my classmates during class, and we seldom meet or contact each other after the course.

During the discussions in the seminars, some of my classmates look very shy. They speak less and seldom share their ideas actively.

Besides, only one student from China (009) mentioned that she preferred to seek help from the classmates instead of the teachers:

My relationship with classmates is good, and whenever I have some academic difficulties, the first one I ask for help is my classmate or friend instead of the teachers. Because I feel relax when I talk to the peers and stress to take to the teachers. Maybe because I used to study in a teacher-centered classroom, teachers are authorities, and I need to obey them.

According to the interview quotes mentioned above, most of the students had relatively positive academic impressions relevant to the teachers or classmates. In contrast, they were less optimistic about their self-learning experience (for instance, ability to acquire new knowledge in a short period) (see Table 5.3.). However, students remained motivated to study and eager to meet the new challenges. At the same time, they described more on independent study and willingness to explore a broader range of strategies to improve their academic abilities, such as seeking help from teachers and classmates.

Table 5.3 Comments on academic adjustment in the second interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
Right attitudes and abilities to deal with the problems helped some of them. The freedom to choose their own topic. The relationships with the tutors. The classroom involvement.	Received huge numbers of information within such a short period. The academic writing Critical thinking ability Plagiarism Language issues Relationship with classmates

### *Third stage academic adjustment*

The third interview was taking place in June, at the end of the teaching period, which was approximately nine months into the study programs. After experiencing different teaching and learning activities in the previous stage, the participants become familiar with the new environment, feel more comfortable involved in academic activities, and adjust accordingly. In general, the workload during this stage was incredibly intensive. The comments revealed that most of them were quite satisfied and said they improved a lot at the end of this semester. Many of them felt ‘settle down and relatively comfortable,’ the degree of stress and uncertainty in academic studies had been reduced. They were quite good at preparing the assignments and already knew what the teachers were expected from them while writing:

I improved a lot compared to the last semester, I scored 60+ in 3 modules, and I was satisfied with it. I never imagined I could make this kind of achievement at the beginning of my academic life (009, China).

Besides, most of the interview participants were satisfied with a variety of facilities provided by the universities, especially those who could help with their academic experience. Some of them mentioned the benefits of attending different workshops and seminars and learned a lot by involving in such a kind academic environment. Some other students pointed out the useful services such as the library, online resources, data sets, or academic tutorial services:

The personal academic writing tutorial service of the university is helpful. The teacher pointed out the existed writing issues and gave me precise comments and suggestions (015, India).

The workshops and seminars specific to some modules were beneficial. I get to know others’ ideas and could listen to others (013, Canada).

Students felt confident in handling the different academic activities, including applying skills and advanced knowledge to academic tasks. Several interviewees agreed that they were satisfied in paraphrasing and using references and felt their efforts and dedication were not in vain.

I have no experience in paraphrasing the text, and it annoyed me. But practice makes perfect; paraphrasing is no exception. I have become more proficient throughout these days and confident in future writing tasks (001, Vietnam).

Additionally, nearly all the students in this interview round reflected their ability to do independent works, such as searching for information for themselves or doing their research. During the interviews, most participants insisted that their critical thinking ability didn't improve significantly, as it was challenging to establish and acquire within such a short period. However, two students mentioned that they'd made a lot of progress through reading and teachers' continuous support and feedbacks.

During this period, I have made remarkable progress in critical thinking, doing things independently, and not being 'duck stuffed' with all the knowledge and information (012, Thailand).

Teachers here always encouraged us to challenge the conclusions of others and establish our ideas. Therefore, thanks to their help, my critical thinking and writing skills were developed (004, Japanese).

Looking back, most of the interview participants were satisfied with their academic achievements in terms of reading. Several students applied extensive reading strategies to increase their reading speed and discovered their research interests through reading lots. Whereas other students found discussion materials with others helped a lot:

I am applying extensive reading strategies, which is mainly focusing on skimming and scanning. It is beneficial as the reading speed increased a lot (003, China)

I found that I need to read more according to my own needs. Discussing the materials with my classmates also helped me understand the contents (001, Vietnam).

Also, several students were quite satisfied with their class involvement at this stage. Although some of them indicated previously that their cultural values and traditions, such as harmony and collectivism, influenced their interactions during class, they become better after several months' adjustment.



I used to be an excellent listener, seldom ask questions, have lots of worries about questioning others' answers, and think whether it is polite to interrupt them. However, after studying for such a long time, I found that opportunities to interact and discuss with others enhanced my learning. I improved a lot (009, China).

Although students' language issues reduced in academic writing, they agreed that they would have made more English-speaking effort. Several interviewees revealed that although they could write their assignments adequately, they still lacked the confidence to speak in class or talk to native speakers. Besides, as there were only a few native students in their class, some of the students said they made less progress in English-speaking due to lack of practice.

I still felt less confident speaking up in class or talking to native speakers. When I felt nervous to talk to others, I said less and less. It's a vicious circle (004, Japanese).

A majority of the students in our modules and accommodation were from China. We usually talk in Chinese, only using English while communicating with the local students or the other international students. Due to a severe shortage of English daily communication, there is no significant spoken English progress throughout this period (009, China).

Some of the interviewees also mentioned other issues in academic adjustments, such as time management, assignment feedback, and personal relations. Firstly, in terms of time management, 12 out of 16 interviewees addressed time management's significance in a one-year postgraduate study. They reported that time was priceless and continues to pass by without coming back. Therefore, how to manage time in the only one-year academic study was very important. The students believed they could do better and get higher marks if they arranged time reasonably. For instance, students from India (015) and Greece (016) stated:

At the beginning of the study, I didn't care a lot about time management; I did what I want to do at that time and never make a plan. It was a waste of time.

I regret that I wasted a lot of time in the previous semesters; I spent a lot of time hanging out with others and seldom prepare the assignments in advance. Therefore, when the deadline was approaching, I felt very nervous and wrote it in a hurry. The result was not good.

However, two interviewees from America (014) and Canada (013) were quite satisfied with their time management process. They illustrated the importance of time management and interpreted what they did during the adjustment process. They insisted that better time management helped them clarify thinking, become well organized, and increase output as a

way of controlling and allocating time. To manage time resources efficiently and effectively both in workloads and academic pursuits could ensure better performances in each field.:

I prefer a life in which everything is under control. I made a clear plan about what to do, how much to write, and what to read every day. I usually finish my assignments a week early for proofreading and see if anything needs modifying. It proved that my effort and dedication have not gone unnoticed. The results were good.

I am quite good at making a study plan and enjoy doing things according to the schedule. It proved by the facts that it is useful and helpful.

Secondly, when it comes to assignment feedbacks, 4 out of 16 participants mentioned it. For example, interviewees from Vietnam (001) and China (003) reflected:

While receiving assignment feedbacks, I found that there was only an overall comment, which gave me some general suggestions on how to improve my future work. I'm not saying it's terrible, but I prefer more detailed comments in each paragraph, not just as a whole.

Sometimes, the general comments confuse me confused, I am unsure which part they mentioned, and I have no idea how to start.

Moreover, three students indicated the effects of personal relations on their academic adjustment process, including their romantic ties and relationships with classmates or roommates. Two interview participants from Vietnam (005) and China (009) shared their experience about the influences of romantic relations:

I broke up with my boyfriends this semester. It hit me seriously. I didn't want to do anything at that time, lying in bed and couldn't stop crying. It was terrible and affected my academic work.

I always fight with my boyfriend due to some trivial things. Whenever that time, I felt so upset and in no mood to study. It reflects poorly on me, especially on academic study.

In addition, an Indian participant (015) interpreted the negative impact of relations with roommates,

My roommates always hold a party at night, not just on weekends. They sing and dance all night. I was woken up several times, could not sleep well, and felt terrible during the class. It has a massive impact on my study till now.

In general, as the third interview stage was taken place at the end of the taught period (nine months into the programs of study), these international students were quite satisfied with their current academic performance. They mostly held a positive attitude towards their academic adjustment process during this period, including applying different academic task skills, getting used to critical thinking and writing skills, and becoming more independent. The intensity of challenges reduced. Many reported getting improved marks in assignments. It was noticeable that students who felt most satisfied with their English development were using it extensively, such as reading or writing. However, some remained unsatisfied with their academic achievements, especially in terms of English speaking. Moreover, students reported that they would learn from their previous experience to manage time properly during the dissertation writing period. Most interestingly, according to some interviewees, their relations with their friends or boyfriends is another crucial consideration to achieve a successful academic performance.

Table 5.4 Comments on academic adjustment in the third interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
<p>The degree of stress and uncertainty had been reduced.</p> <p>Pleased with the various facilities provided by the universities.</p> <p>Confident in handling the different academic issues.</p> <p>Critical thinking skills and ability to do independent work.</p> <p>Language problems reduced in academic writing reduced.</p>	<p>English speaking ability.</p> <p>Time management.</p> <p>Assignments feedbacks.</p> <p>Personal relations.</p>

## 5.2. Academic difficulties

### 5.2.1. Quantitative findings

The questionnaire survey in all three stages also includes a question that required the respondents to specify their academic difficulties (see methodology chapter). Table 5.5. represents the quantitative data related to the academic difficulties the international students might face during their early study periods (at the early teaching weeks and the beginning of the second semester) in the UK. As a multiple-choice question, the students were asked to tick any that apply. The results are as follows (Table 5.5), including the frequency, valid percentage, and ranking order.

Table 5.5 Academic difficulties in the first and second stages

Item	Frequency		Valid Percentage		Order	
	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
1. Academic writing	45	81	41.6	75	8	2
2. Knowledge related to plagiarism and its relevant practice.	50	77	46.2	71.3	7	3
3. Critical thinking ability	72	82	74.1	75.9	4	1
4. Time management for my studies	55	66	50.9	61.1	6	5
5. Doing independent studies	85	72	78.7	66.7	1	4
6. The UK learning style	84	62	77.8	57.4	2	6
7. Understanding subject knowledge in my field.	80	50	66.7	46.3	3	7
8. Understanding what the lecturers said in the class or seminar	60	43	55.6	39.8	5	8
9. Understanding the accent of the teachers or tutors	32	30	29.6	27.8	9	9

According to Table 5.5, doing the independent study (78.7%), the UK learning style (77.8%), and understanding subject knowledge in their field (66.7%) were the top three frequently mentioned academic difficulties encountered by the international students at the early teaching weeks (first stage). At that time, the students had just entered the university, only had limited academic experiences, focused more on their modules, and hoped to learn more during the class. Like the interview findings, some international students struggled to follow the teachers as they usually spoke too fast (see section 5.1.2). Above half of the survey participants also reported difficulties understanding what the lecturers said during the class (55.6%). As students didn't prepare any assignment, the issues such as academic writing (41.6%) or plagiarism (46.2%) were neglected to a degree in the early stage.

As the students proceeded with their academic studies, some other academic difficulties emerged. In the second stage survey, different from the first stage survey, the two most frequently mentioned academic difficulties were academic writing (75%) and critical thinking ability (75.9%), especially those from non-English speaking countries, such as China, Vietnam, or Thailand. Additionally, many international students pointed out that they had difficulties in knowledge associated with plagiarism (71.3%), which revealed that those postgraduate international students had more concerns about whether plagiarism issues would affect their academic performance. It might be the fact that it would be difficult for some of them to learn how to paraphrase or quote the literature properly in such a short period (see section 5.1.2.). Besides, some difficulties were common to all the students regardless of where they are from, including time management (61.1%) and doing the independent study (66.7%). In contrast, other issues were related to adaptation to the new environment, such as getting used to the UK learning style (57.4%) and understanding their field knowledge (46.3%). The fewest students cited to have issues related to understanding the teachers' accent (27.8%)

indicated that they had the fewest concerns in this field. Similarly, during the interview process, only a Chinese participant (006) mentioned this point.

Table 5.6. represent the quantitative data focusing on whether international students still had these academic difficulties at the end of their teaching period. A six-point Likert-type scale was used, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). The results are demonstrated as follows (see Table 5.6.), indicating mode, mean, frequency, and percentage.

Table 5.6 Quantitative information on the check of academic difficulties

Item	Mode	Mean	Levels of Agree/Disagree					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. Now I still have difficulty in academic writing</b>	2	2.18	29 (28.4)	47 (46.1)	12 (11.8)	8 (7.8)	5 (4.9)	1 (1.0)
<b>2. Now I still have difficulty in knowledge related to plagiarism and its relevant practice.</b>	2	2.19	36 (35.3)	32 (31.4)	19 (18.6)	10 (9.8)	4 (3.9)	1 (1.0)
<b>3. Now I still have difficulty in critical thinking ability</b>	4	3.59	6 (5.9)	22 (21.6)	13 (12.7)	31 (30.4)	27 (26.5)	3 (2.9)
<b>4. Now I still have difficulty in time management for my studies</b>	2	2.43	27 (26.5)	34 (33.3)	19 (18.6)	16 (15.7)	4 (3.9)	2 (2.0)
<b>5. Now I still have difficulty in doing independent studies</b>	2	2.74	16 (15.7)	36 (35.3)	25 (24.5)	12 (11.8)	10 (9.8)	3 (2.9)
<b>6. Now I still have difficulty in the UK learning style</b>	2	3.03	10 (9.8)	32 (31.4)	26 (25.5)	17 (16.7)	13 (12.7)	4 (3.9)
<b>7. Now I still have difficulty in understanding subject knowledge in my field.</b>	2	2.67	14 (13.7)	36 (35.3)	31 (30.4)	14 (13.7)	5 (4.9)	2 (2.0)
<b>8. Now I still have difficulty in understanding what the lecturers said in the class or seminar</b>	2	2.66	16 (15.7)	37 (36.3)	24 (23.5)	17 (16.7)	7 (6.9)	1 (1.0)
<b>9. Now I still have difficulty in understanding the accent of the teachers or tutors</b>	2	2.26	26 (25.5)	38 (37.3)	22 (21.6)	12 (11.8)	2 (2.0)	2 (2.0)
<b>10. If given chance to the beginning of my studies, I would come with more background knowledge in this field.</b>	2	2.70	13 (12.7)	39 (38.2)	28 (27.5)	14 (13.7)	4 (3.9)	4 (3.9)
<b>11. If given chance to the beginning of my study, I would come with a higher level of English language ability.</b>	4	3.67	7 (6.9)	14 (13.7)	19 (18.6)	32 (31.4)	26 (25.5)	4 (3.9)
<b>12. If given chance to the beginning of my study, I would come with a better time management.</b>	2	2.70	8 (7.8)	28 (27.5)	33 (32.4)	23 (22.5)	8 (7.8)	2 (2.0)

Levels of Agree/Disagree: 1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree

The research findings above revealed that after two terms of academic adjustment, critical thinking ability was still deemed the main difficulty for international postgraduate students.

Understanding the lecture content or teachers' accents remained stable while considering academic difficulties at the end of their teaching period.

A comparison between Table 5.5 and 5.6 indicates that the number of students who have difficulty in critical thinking ability decreased the least at the end of their teaching period, stated the less improvement in this area, whereas difficulties in academic writing and plagiarism issues reduce dramatically throughout the nine months because unlike critical thinking ability which seemed to be difficult to established and practiced, academic writing and issues related to plagiarism could be learned through practice. Besides, the numbers of students whose academic difficulties were associated with doing independent study, adjusting to UK learning style, and understanding their subject knowledge were also reduced near the end of their academic year. Additionally, based on the above findings, the number of participants who had difficulties in understanding teachers' accents remain roughly the same, which might be a result of the fact that there was less need for the international students to overcome this difficulty. It had less impact on their academic studies. Moreover, different from interview findings (see section 5.2.2), where half of the participants said that they would have better time management if they had the chance to go back to the beginning. However, only a small group of students in questionnaire surveys strongly agreed with this point.

Regarding given a chance back to the beginning of their study, more than 65% of the students agreed that they would come with a higher English language level. This finding revealed that, in general, students felt they need to improve their English language ability more than background knowledge in their field since the knowledge could be acquired via learning in a short period. In contrast, perfect English skills need to be practiced day after day. In terms of those from English speaking countries, while talking about their academic difficulties, they didn't mentioned issues related to the academic writing, critical thinking, doing independent study or understanding the teacher' accents, however, difficulty in time management was mentioned instead and agreed that they would come with a matter time management if given chance to the beginning.

Based on the above analysis, the quantitative results in this section support the qualitative data most of the time and reveals that the vast majority of the students had various academic difficulties according to different reasons in different stages. Therefore, the next section will focus on how international students were coping with these academic difficulties.

### **5.2.2. Qualitative finding**

All interviewees reported that they encountered academic difficulties more or less in adjusting to the new learning environment. Most of the participants focused on practical issues instead

of the ones directly relevant to their programs. According to the previous interview findings (see section 5.1.2.), more than half of the participants pointed out their academic writing difficulties, especially those from non-English speaking countries. They highlighted the more commonly mentioned factors, such as English language ability or paraphrase issues. Moreover, time management, heavy workloads, independent study, and critical thinking were also pointed out by some students (see section 5.1.2.).

### 5.3. Coping with academic difficulties

#### 5.3.1. Quantitative findings

Moreover, the third stage questionnaire also includes a question related to how to deal with their academic difficulties while pursuing overseas studies. A six-point Likert- type scale was introduced, ranging from 1(never) to 6 (very frequently). The findings of the findings are presented below (see Table 5.7), including mode, mean, frequency, and percentages

Table 5.7 Quantitative data on coping with academic difficulties

Item	Frequency	Valid Percentage	Order
1. I have used the INTO in-sessional lessons to improve my English language ability.	33	32.4%	6
2. I have used the academic writing support service to improve my writing skills.	20	19.6%	7
3. I have used the library support service to find resources.	50	49.0%	4
4. I have used the IT service from university IT Service Desk	46	45.1%	5
5. For my academic problems, I ask for help from my teachers or personal tutors	56	54.9%	3
6. For my academic problems, I ask help for my classmates (other international students) or friends from my home country.	74	72.5%	1
7. For my academic problems, I ask help for my British friends or classmates.	61	59.8%	2

International students are likely to face a wide range of difficulties, and some are easier to overcome than others. According to quantitative findings in Table 5.7, seeking help from classmates or friends from their home country was often used, following by asking help from their British friends and teachers. Fewer international students used in-sessional lessons service or academic writing support service to improve their ability or solve their academic issues since some of them were not familiar with these support services. Once they encounter academic difficulties, they never thought of using them. In addition, similar to the qualitative findings, many participants frequently use library support services and IT services to solve their problems.

Therefore, the above information indicates that international students tended to seek help from the co-nationals when they have academic problems rather than their British friends. It might be that they felt better assisted by those who share similar experiences and speak the same language. Teachers were less frequently considered a helpful, direct, and immediate way to deal with academic issues than the peer groups. Coincidentally, these findings also support the qualitative results that international students tried to find different ways to cope with academic problems and acquire adequate skills. These qualitative findings will be presented as follows (see section 5.3.2.)

### **5.3.2. Qualitative findings**

During the past nine months, international students encountered various academic difficulties. Some of them had been solved, whereas others remained at the end of their teaching period. For instance, a male student from Vietnam (011) admitted that the difficulties he faced had been solved, as he said:

At the time when I start my academic here, I suffered from various academic challenges. Luckily, they all worked out in the end with the help from others and my efforts.

Whereas the other students reflected that although they tried their best to overcome the difficulties, there are still some unsolved issues. A Japanese interview participant (004) stated that even though most of the challenges were conquered, there were still areas for improvement:

Although our teachers helped me a lot in the structural issues and gave me some suggestions to solve some problems, the issues such as critical thinking ability are what no one else could help with. I have to learn and experience by myself. I still need to work harder and practice more.

In overcoming these challenges, 6 out of 16 participants emphasized the significance of the university's support services. More specifically, the interviewees reported that the writing centre and library staff offered them some practical support. As one participant from India (015) noted:

Many times, these days, I have been stuck with writing different types of assignments. I booked a reservation to meet the staff in the writing center. They were friendly and very helpful in guiding me with the writing tasks.

An interviewee from China (003) also shared her experience about how her difficulties related to academic writing has been solved:



I have attended several in-session classes previously. My writing ability has been improved a lot since then. Moreover, the library staff is also accommodating. They introduced how to access various online journals and assisted me in finding the resources.

In addition, 11 out of 16 interviewees said they are always seeking help from their tutors, lecturers, friends, or classmates to deal with their academic difficulties. For instance, a participant from Indonesia noted:

The lecturers usually give me feedbacks both for the structures as well as the English expressions. They helped me a lot.

A Chinese male interviewee (006) indicated that he preferred the help from his friend and admitted he asked help from his local friend for proofreading before submission:

They were very kind and did it with patience. They told me what the problems were to avoid happened again.

Among them, half of the participants admitted that they only discussed their academic problems with their teachers rather than personal issues. As a Vietnamese student (001) mentioned that she emailed her teachers when she met academic difficulties, but the contact was only limited to the academic issue:

As I used to study in a teacher-centered environment, teachers were authorities and felt like there was a gap between us. Therefore, I didn't form a habit of sharing personal lives with them and felt shy.

Interestingly, one interview participant (014) from America stated that she didn't ask for help from the tutors or lecturers. She was quite familiar with the education system and felt confident in coping with any academic difficulties.

## **5.4. Evaluation of academic satisfaction over time**

### **5.4.1. Quantitative findings**

At the end of each stage's questionnaire survey, participants were asked to evaluate their academic experience via a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely agree). A one-way ANOVA with repeated measures was then used to investigate international students' academic satisfaction over time.

According to the descriptive statistics table (see Table 5.8), its academic adjustment in the first stage was rated the lowest, whereas the third stage rated the highest. The Mean score increased as time went by, the assumption of sphericity was violated ( $\chi^2(2) = 0.92, p=0.01$ ). The data indicated the statistically significant changes in their academic satisfaction over

time ( $p < .0005$ ). Figure 5.1 presented a more comprehensive view of international students' academic satisfaction, which showed that their satisfactions increased dramatically as time went by, especially from the second and third stages.

Table 5.8 Descriptive statistics of academic adjustment satisfaction

Items	Stages	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall academic adjustment satisfaction	T1	3.14	1.04
	T2	4.03	0.98
	T3	5.02	0.95

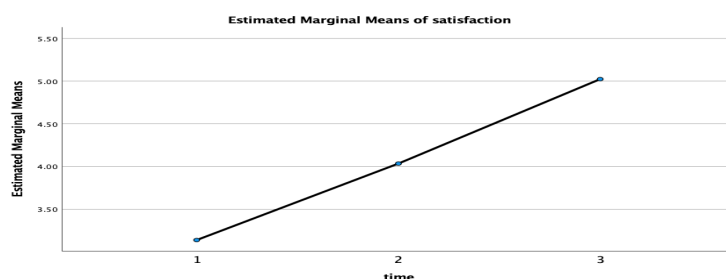


Figure 5.1 Academic adjustment satisfaction over time

#### 5.4.2. Qualitative findings

In general, the participants were quite satisfied with their academic adjustment experience during the past nine months according to various reasons. The definition of satisfaction depended on their own. Some students pointed out why they were satisfied with their academic experience because they experienced something new. For instance, an Indonesian interviewee (007) said that the learning environment here was entirely different from her home country. It gave her great motivation to pursue it with all her efforts. A participant from Vietnam (001) agreed:

The new environment and education system make me feel relaxed, which sparked my interest even more.

Additionally, some students were quite worried initially but got used to it in a very short period and felt satisfied since then. As a Japanese interviewee (004) reflected:

I improved a lot in the past nine months. Everything was not as difficult as I imagined. The modules were fascinating, and our lecturers constantly interact with us during the class.

A student from South Africa (010) also expressed satisfaction about his academic experience in the UK. He said that the facilities here were more advanced compared to his home country,

he felt lucky to have a chance to study here, the university provided him with a variety of support services, and he could use it for free. Therefore, apart from their academic achievement, the university's support and resources (both the quality of the facilities and faculty) were deemed as contributory factors to international students' academic satisfaction. However, there were still a few students who felt not very satisfied with their academic experiences since they came to the UK, for their reasons or external factors. For example, a Greek student (016) mentioned:

In terms of my academic experiences, I was not unsatisfied, just not very satisfied. I think it could be better if I work harder and spent more time on the preparation process.

Besides, an interviewee from Thailand (012) also stated his regret about his recent academic experience and admitted that if he could make a clear plan, he would become more satisfied at the moment. However, external factors were commonly relevant to the curriculum, the interaction with the lecturers or teachers, and comments received for assignments. We could know how to improve international students' academic experiences by looking into these given cases. For example, a Vietnamese student (005) reflected that although the program sounds like an integration program, combined communication with management, they study each field's knowledge. These two subjects seemed unrelated. They were quite confused about how to combine them and applied them to future work. Another Chinese student (006) stated:

I heard from other programs that they have extra academic writing training related to the specific modules. I hope it could be the same in my program. If so, I could have a better academic experience.

An interviewee from Greece (016) also mentioned that although a one-year program saves time, it's a challenging journey. They were forced to move forward even if there were a lot they didn't understand. Besides, an interview participant from Vietnam (005) noted:

The feedback received from the assignments was often too general, they told me that my topic was too broad, and I need to narrow it down. But actually, I don't know what they expected or preferred. I was disappointed and felt lost.

As the UK's learning process relied more on independent study rather than the 'one-way process,' where the teachers would deliver the knowledge to the students directly, therefore, under such circumstances, the student's capacity played a significant role. According to the above example, the degree of international students' academic satisfaction is relevant to both

their self-ability and external impact. They are not in conflict but complementary. In order to have higher academic satisfaction, neither of them can be neglected.

The above findings from interviews were consistent with the questionnaire survey results (see section 5.4.1.) that the students were quite satisfied with their academic experience during the nine-months. However, findings from questionnaire surveys provided an image of how their satisfaction changed over time, whereas qualitative interviews focused more on why the students were satisfied with their academic adjustment experience.

## **5.5 Overview on academic adjustment**

This section explores what international students would do to have a better academic adjustment (see section 5.5.1) if they had the chance to go back to the past at the very beginning of their academic study and interpreted their suggestions for the university (see section 5.5.2.).

### **5.5.1. A better academic experience**

Although many students admitted that they could handle academic difficulties easily when they were at home, however, when decided to study abroad. After arriving in the UK, they realized that they were in a different learning environment and experienced a variety of academic challenges. To have a better academic experience and accomplish good results, these students began to find out how to be a 'good student' in the new context and quickly adjust to the new position.

10 out of 16 interview participants said they weren't going to change anything if they had the opportunity to return to the past. They said that they'd worked hard enough and there are no more regrets. They tried to do everything they could to adjust to the new learning environment better. For instance, a student from China (009) reflected that she gave up many extracurricular activities throughout the academic year, but she had no regret in doing so. She got what she wants and didn't want to change anything if she went back to the past. Another interviewee from Vietnam (005) agreed that she would do nothing different, as everything was fine and went as she expected. A Japanese participant (004) also stated:

I think I already work very hard and couldn't think of anything to change.

According to their comments, they deemed themselves as the dominator during their academic adjustment process. They believed that the harder they work, the better results they could achieve. If the results didn't meet their expectations, they would keep working until they succeed. It indicated that this kind of student could deal with the issues both externally and internally. For example, an American student (014) mentioned during the interview:

I believe I am the one who could make a change whenever I encountered difficulties. Because I know I am strong enough and hard-working enough, it's only a matter of time.

Whereas for the other students, some of them admitted that if they had the chance to return to the beginning of their study, they would make a difference. Several students said they would better prepare, such as getting more knowledge about the local culture and their programs, reading module materials in advance, or preparing assignments earlier. As an interviewee from Thailand (012) stated:

I would spend more time reading the documents uploaded on the blackboard to prepare myself better and have a better performance during the class.

In addition, some of them said that they would pay more attention to their language and critical thinking ability and spend more time communicating with the locals. As a Vietnamese interviewee (011) stated:

It doesn't mean that I am not satisfied with my current academic performance. I want to say that I would do it better if I could do it again. To practice more and enjoy the time with the students from different backgrounds.

Moreover, only 9.8% of the students strongly or completely agreed (see section 5.2.1) that if they could go back to the past, they would have better time management. During interviews, half of the participants admitted that they would manage their time better if they have the opportunity. For instance, students from Greece (016) and China (006) interpreted:

Now I realized the importance of time management, but it's a little bit late. If I could start over, I would start to prepare my assignments very early to avoid a last-minute panic.

I used to become more inclined to leave things to the last minute and accomplish my assignments only at the night before they are due. It is not a good habit. If I could do it again, I would be more organized and manage time better.

Moreover, different from 60.8% of the respondents in questionnaire surveys (see section 5.2.1.) agreed that they would come with a higher level of English language ability, only one student (003) during the interview mentioned this point.

### **5.5.2. Suggestions related to academic adjustment**

Students' suggestions were mainly focused on the program's improvements and called for more support for the teachers and university. For instance, some students suggested the improvement in the module of research methods. More details could be added, such as

inserting the data in SPSS and running the analysis according to the different data sets. They also commented that it would be better to drop their speed during the class due to language and education system issues. Interestingly, the students emphasized the importance of reducing the class size in each program. The big class would make it difficult for students to interact with others or hear the teachers. Additionally, several students pay attention to the support services' quantity and request more support in lessons related to using different analysis software, assignment proofreading tutorials, and additional academic writing lessons in terms of each specific module. As a Chinese participant (006) stated:

I suggest the university could provide us with a proofreading tutorial and have more available teachers to help us with it.

Other students' suggestions were more practical, including the availability of the library resources and supervisions. As a student from China (009) stated:

Sometimes when I find some books in the library, they are constantly being rented out, especially the popular ones or those suggested by our teachers. I hope the university could prepare books for us and cooperate with the teachers regularly to make sure what the students need.

Similarly, another French interview participant (002) also reflected that she suggested that the library resources need to be more up to date. Several times, she searched the more recent books on the library websites; it was usually lack of availability. A student from Indian (008) also expressed his ideas related to the library resources, as he noted:

I hope the university could buy more databases and add more permissions to access various journal articles online.

Besides, several students suggested that the modules' amounts need to be distributed each semester equally. As a Vietnam participant (001) said:

Nearly all my modules were squeezed in the first semester. At that time, I was not familiar with everything and needed more time to adjust to the academic environment. I suggest that the university could move some modules to the second or the third semester to reduce the heavy workload and improve the academic experience at the same time.

Moreover, half of the participants suggested the significance of recruiting more local students in their modules and making the population diverse. For example, a student from Indonesia (007) mentioned that she hoped the university could consider the population diversity while recruiting the students. Most of her classmates were from China, and there were only five

local students in her module. Under this circumstance, they usually lacked interactions with the natives. Another Chinese participant (003) also stated:

There were too many Chinese students around me, whether in class or after class, beyond what I expected. Sometimes I felt I was still in China; I hope the university could enroll more native students or international students from other countries.

These suggestions were all relevant to their academic difficulties, mentioned in the previous section (see section 5.2.1), and reinforced the issues raised by the findings described early. It also indicated that the universities should provide numerous academic support services to lead a more effective academic adjustment process. Besides, according to the quantitative findings in section 5.3.1, these international students were more inclined to seek help from their friends or classmates instead of prioritizing the university support service. In contrast, the interview results indicated the significance of solving problems by introducing support from the university or the teachers.

## **5.6. Summary**

Findings related to international students' academic adjustment revealed that it was very common and natural that academic difficulties occurred during the adjustment process. Critical thinking ability and academic writing were the top two difficulties mentioned most frequently by the international students in questionnaire surveys and interviews. To coping with these difficulties, peer students, teachers, and university support services play significant roles. According to the findings, international students tended to seek help from students from their home countries whenever they need academic assistance. Besides, the university's support and resources are also deemed the contributory factors for their successful academic adjustment. The qualitative interview stages' positive findings generally support and were consistent with the related questionnaire survey results.

Regarding academic adjustment satisfactions, findings from One-way ANOVA indicated that students' level of satisfaction increased dramatically from the early teaching weeks till the end of their taught period (see section 5.4.). The interview results might explain the reason why students were quite satisfied with their academic experience. Some students reported that the university's support and resources or the teachers' help contributed to their academic satisfaction, whereas other students admitted why they felt satisfied with the academic adjustment was because they experienced something new. The new environment and education system made them feel relax. However, several participants in the interviews revealed that although they were satisfied with the current academic experiences, they believed that it could be better if they work harder.

## Chapter 6. Findings: Sociocultural adjustment

This chapter presents the findings regarding MA Degree international postgraduate student's sociocultural adjustment. The results include quantitative questionnaire surveys and qualitative interviews (6.2) to investigate students' sociocultural experience in each stage (6.1), social contact and friendship networks (6.2), and evaluation of sociocultural satisfaction over time (6.3). Moreover, sociocultural suggestions (6.4) and a summary on sociocultural adjustment (section 6.5) are also presented. The results are expected to contribute to understanding, knowledge, and services related to the international student's sociocultural adjustment.

### 6.1. Sociocultural adjustment experiences in each stage

#### 6.1.1. Quantitative findings

##### *Sociocultural experiences in each stage*

All the questionnaire surveys adopted a six-point Likert-type agreement scale (see section 3.5.3.) to investigate international students' sociocultural experience at different times. Scores for each item range from 1 (completely unsatisfied) to 6 (completely satisfied).

According to the quantitative questionnaire survey data, the overall mean scores for the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale in each stage were 3.88, 3.55, and 3.11. It indicated that although international students were relatively satisfied with their sociocultural adjustment to the host environment at the early teaching weeks (T1), the degree of satisfaction has reduced since then.

Among the items, making friends from their home country and going shopping were rated as the highest among all the questionnaire surveys. In contrast, making British friends and understanding jokes and humor had relatively low mean scores in each stage, indicating that students were unsatisfied with these issues and might encounter difficulties.

Table 6.1 Items rated as most satisfied in each stage

Stages	Order	Items	Percentages of 'completely satisfied' or 'mostly satisfied'
T1	1	Making friends from my home country	78.3%
	2	Going shopping	71.7%
	3	Getting used to the pace of life	63.4%
	4	Going to social events/gatherings/functions	60%
	5	Making friends with other international students	58.4%
T2	1	Making friends from my home country	70.3%
	2	Going shopping	66.5%
	3	Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	61.2%



	4	Using the transport system	60.3%
	5	Following rules and regulations	57.6%
<b>T3</b>	1	Making friends from my home country	69.8%
	2	Going shopping	65.4%
	3	Getting used to the pace of life	63.2%
	4	Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	61.5%
	5	Understanding cultural differences	55.6%

Table 6.2 Items rated as most unsatisfied in each stage

Stages	Order	Items rated as most unsatisfied	Percentages of ‘completely unsatisfied’ or ‘mostly unsatisfied’
<b>T1</b>	1	Living away from family members overseas	41.7%
	2	Understanding jokes and humour	35.0%
	3	Talking about yourself with others	33.3%
	4	Understanding the local accent/language	30.8%
	5	Making British friends	29.2%
<b>T2</b>	1	Making British friends	40.6%
	2	Dealing with the climate	40.2%
	3	Adapting to local accommodations	33.5%
	4	Going into pubs or bars	32.1%
	5	Understanding jokes and humour	28.5%
<b>T3</b>	1	Making British friends	38.3%
	2	Making friends with other international students	32.6%
	3	Going to social events/gatherings/functions	31.7%
	4	Seeing things from a British persons’ point of view	29.5%
	5	Understanding jokes and humour	28.4%

As shown in Table 6.1 and 6.2., international students were satisfied with making friends with other international students in early teaching weeks (T1). However, as time went by, it changed into an unsatisfied item at the end of their taught period (T3). Although they were quite satisfied with understanding cultural difficulties, the students were still not very satisfied with seeing things from a British persons’ point of view. According to Table 6.7, students rated as ‘unsatisfied’ were related to interaction with local people or adjust to the British environment. It might be the fact that although the host environment and local people were generally friendly towards them (see section 6.1.2), they were still unsatisfied with their friendship with the British.

In general, the quantitative findings were in line with the results of the interviews. For instance, at the beginning of their program (T1), both the interviewees and survey participants

were satisfied with making new friends or going to different activities. As time went by, the issues such as dealing with climates, going into pubs or clubs, making British friends were mentioned by many students as unsatisfied items (T2 and T3). Interestingly, making friends from their home country played a crucial role in both qualitative and quantitative results. The findings from questionnaire surveys general support the qualitative interviews, which will be presented the following section (see section 6.1.2.).

### ***Social-cultural activities***

The questionnaire includes a question requiring the participants to indicate how often they did the following activities: participating in activities with students from their home country, with other international students, with British students or people, participating in activities organized by student’s union or societies, and go to religious activities. A six-point Likert-type scale was introduced, ranging from 1(never) to 6 (very frequently). The results were presented below (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Quantitative findings on sociocultural activities

Item	Mode	Mean	Levels of frequency					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. I participate in activities with students from my home country.</b>	5	4.53	3 (2.9)	6 (5.9)	10 (9.8)	22 (21.6)	37 (36.3)	24 (23.5)
<b>2. I participate in activities with other international students.</b>	4	3.61	5 (4.9)	18 (17.6)	24 (23.5)	27 (26.5)	21 (20.6)	7 (6.9)
<b>3. I participate in activities with British students or people.</b>	3	3.01	9 (8.8)	25 (24.5)	36 (35.3)	23 (22.5)	6 (5.9)	3 (2.9)
<b>4. I participate in activities organized by student’s union or societies.</b>	2	2.93	11 (10.8)	33 (32.4)	28 (27.5)	17 (16.7)	8 (7.8)	5 (4.9)
<b>5. I go to religious services or activities.</b>	1	2.39	42 (41.2)	28 (27.5)	7 (6.9)	5 (4.9)	15 (14.7)	5 (4.9)

Levels of frequency: 1-Never 2- Very rarely 3- Rarely 4- Occasionally 5- Frequently 6- Very frequently

Based on the quantitative data presented above (see Table 6.3), most international students said that they at least participated in the activity with students from their home country occasionally (Item 1). Many participants replied that they interacted with those home students frequently, which is similar to the results in qualitative findings (see section 6.2.2.). More than half of the students said they rarely joined the activities with British students or people (Item 3). It also indicated the possibilities of improving the interactions between international students and British students. Many of them were not frequently interacting with the British students and were not satisfied with making British friends although they wish to do so.

This question was asked at the end of their teaching period. Less than a quarter of students agreed that they at least attended the activities organized by students' union or various societies occasionally. It was quite similar to the qualitative findings (see section 6.1.2), as it was a waste of time (according to participant 015 from India). Data from Table 6.3 also showed the importance of other international students' roles (Item 2). Above half of the international students said that they were at least occasionally joined the activities held by other international students. Moreover, compared with the above items, religion's role was not a significant issue as only a small part of the students joined in the religious activities according to the survey. It might be due to the reason that most of the students in this survey had no religious beliefs.

### ***Coping with sociocultural difficulties***

To investigate how international students coping with their social cultural difficulties mentioned in previous sections (see section 6.1.2.), the questionnaire survey in the third stage also required the participants to indicate how often they used university support services. A six-point Likert scale was introduced, ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (very frequently). The results were presented below (see Table 6.4), including mode, mean, frequency, and percentage. These results were compared with the findings on similar issues in qualitative findings.

Table 6.4 Quantitative data on university support services

Item	Mode	Mean	Levels of frequency					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. I have used the university's welcome week service.</b>	5	4.60	3 (2.9)	5 (4.9)	9 (8.8)	20 (19.6)	41 (40.2)	24 (23.5)
<b>2. I have used the Student Advice Service from the university.</b>	5	4.51	1 (1.0)	5 (4.9)	14 (13.7)	24 (23.5)	37 (36.3)	21 (20.6)
<b>3. I have used the counselling service from the university Mental Health Team</b>	1	1.67	66 (64.7)	19 (18.6)	8 (7.8)	4 (3.9)	4 (3.9)	1 (1.0)
<b>4. I have used the university Careers Service to prepare for my CV and find part-time job</b>	1	2.66	30 (29.4)	25 (24.5)	17 (16.7)	14 (13.7)	12 (11.8)	4 (3.9)
<b>5. I have used the Accommodation and Reception Services from the university</b>	5	4.51	7 (6.9)	7 (6.9)	8 (7.8)	19 (18.6)	33 (32.4)	28 (27.5)

Levels of frequency: 1-Never 2- Very rarely 3- Rarely 4- Occasionally 5- Frequently 6- Very frequently

The above findings emphasized the contributions of the welcome week service, as well as student advice service from the university, which also supports the interview findings as to how international students became familiar with the university and other students and how the student advice services help them to solve the problems throughout the year. The university

accommodation and reception services were also frequently used by several international students to solve their daily life problems. However, a small part of the survey participants mentioned that they never use the accommodation and reception service because they didn't live in the university-owned accommodation or rent a private house (according to an interviewee from Vietnam). Besides, only a small part of the participants agreed that they used the career services occasionally or less than occasionally, which is the same as the interviews' results as only one student mentioned it during that time.

The counseling service from the university mental health team was used least often by the international students. Above half of the international students never used this service. The result was consistent with the qualitative interviews' findings, as only one student in the interview mentioned using it.

### **6.1.2. Qualitative findings**

#### ***First stage sociocultural adjustment***

The first stage interview was taking place about two to three weeks into the students' programs. Therefore, the students' opinions were mainly connected with their initial experiences in the host environment. In general, results indicated that students widely expressed a positive attitude towards both the new environment in the UK and their own sociocultural adjustment.

After they arrived in the UK, they moved into their accommodation, attended welcome activities and induction weeks, and met other international students and the local students. Most of the interview participants had enjoyed that period very much, the positive experiences included making friends, joining different societies, and trying new food. In making new friends, 15 out of 16 participants were quite satisfied with their experiences and spoke about them in detail. Some of them made friends with international students from other countries because they had something in common or they had the same hobby, just as a student from Canada (013) stated:

I used to study in a small town. The stores usually closed early. I never enjoyed such a colorful after-school life. I made new friends since I came here, both of us like going shopping and taking pictures. We often walk alongside the river to enjoy the sunset and then relax in a club.

Additionally, when talking about something related to the food, most of them held a positive attitude. The students said that cuisine could be an excellent insight into a country's history and culture, and British food was no exception. Some of them made adequate preparations before they head to the UK. Just as two interviewees from America (014) indicated:

Before I came to the UK, I searched on the internet to check out the traditional British foods and discover where to find them in this city.

However, there were still several students who found the food provided unfamiliar and unappetizing. For instance, a Vietnamese interview participant (001) reflected:

I didn't get used to British food because I don't like dairy products and the fried food.

Moreover, most of the students recalled joining the various societies during the first stage interview. They were curious about the societies and took an active part in them. A Chinese student (003) shared her experience:

I still remember when every society displayed and performed on the campus. Its professional performance and detailed introduction made me dazzled. I didn't know which one to choose.

In addition, a participant from India (015) stated that she had a clear target while choosing the societies:

I am interested in baking, but I didn't have any chance before. This time, I will take the opportunity and practice more in the baking society. Hope I could become a 'dessert master' soon.

However, 2 out of 16 participants held negative attitudes towards the extracurricular activities. They said that the reason they were here was to study. It comes before everything else, and they didn't want to spend their time on these things. It was a waste of time. Just as a Chinese student (009) reflected:

I think one-year of study in the UK is relatively short. I will spend more time on academic study rather than interact with others. I should focus on my study. Doing other things will distract me.

In addition, many students admitted that they were especially eager to learn about their host cities and local culture, including their traditions and histories. Their perceptions of the UK and the city had improved over this period (from their arrival till the first interview round). Several interview participants recalled that the local gallery and museum played a significant role. For example, a Chinese interviewee (003) who went to the city art gallery mentioned:

I was shocked when I saw the paintings. It described what the city looks like at that time.

What just amazed me is that hundreds of years passed, the still city seems remarkably similar to the old one. All is well protected, and it is part of cultural heritage. We can learn a lot from it.

Besides, some students considered that learning the city's history and culture and interacting with the locals was essential. A student from South Africa (010) indicated:

Once I drunk in a bar and met an old gentleman. He was born in the city and grew up here as well. He told me a lot about the city in the past. That was something I've never heard before, which increasing my knowledge.

Similarly, exploring the local shops and main attractions was also essential to understand the city and its culture. They said that they were getting to know the origin of the city's name and its story in the past after visiting the main attractions. Besides, another participant from India (015) claimed that shopping in the local shops was also a good choice, as she said:

I think the local shops allow me to be involved in the local people and their lifestyle, which could help me adjust to the new environment quickly.

What's more, students felt more personal agency in sociocultural adjustment compared with their academic adjustment. For instance, a Japanese interviewee (004) mentioned that she refused to change the eating habits of eating rice and fish in breakfast. Similarly, a student from China (009) reported that she was occupied with her study and almost had no interaction with the local people. Interesting, she also mentioned that she preferred not to speak English after class and thought they need the Chinese language. They need Chinese culture and identity to identify who they were and where they came from.

To sum up, international students' comments on sociocultural adjustment in the first stage were largely related to their individual experiences. Part of them compared their home countries and the UK whereas others talked more about their initial feelings about the social life. In general, the students were satisfied with their sociocultural adjustment; they were very motivated to go to new places, try new food and make new friends. They knew the city better and held positive attitudes towards the local life. Although some participants encounter minor problems interacting with local people, the positive comments still dominated the first interview round.

Table 6.5 Comments on sociocultural adjustment in the first interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
Making new friends Joining different societies Trying new food Learn about the city and local culture Using English name	Communication and interaction with others

### *Second stage sociocultural adjustment*

The second interview took place in February. The students were five months into their programs at that time. They had more experience of living in the UK and interact with the people around them. However, many problems had arisen along with their sociocultural adjustment. The findings indicated that the majority of comments were less positive compared with the first stage.

In terms of the positive comments, most participants admitted that they were more familiar with the host environment, which was a kind of settle down. Some participants also traveled to other places in the UK and knew more about the country. For instance, interviewees from France (002) and China (003) stated:

My sociocultural experience has been pretty good. I know the city better these days and visited some other places within the UK.

Initially, it was a little difficult for me, luckily, our school and teachers were really helpful.

For some of them, they were able to preserve their cultural practices and maintained positive relationships with their classmates and their people. As an interview participant from Indonesia (007) said:

I came from a conservative society, but I don't face any difficulties here. People are friendly and willing to help others.

Besides, a Chinese student also admitted (003) that their seminars helped them get to know each other better, especially with those from China. They became more intimate and got together to have fun.

However, not all the participants were satisfied with their second stage of sociocultural adjustment. Several interviewees reflected that some issues caused uneasiness, such as the over-consumption of alcohol or accommodation environment. In terms of drinking culture encountered in the UK, it was the most frequently mentioned cause of negative impressions on international students. Half of the interview participants commented on it. For instance, an Indian student (015) interpreted her impressions:

I went there once and left shortly after. It was noisy, and I don't like the crowd and drunken people and could not understand their passions to go there so often.

Besides, several students found that the environment of their accommodation to be problematic. For instance, a participant from Vietnam (005) recalled that the noise, such as

loud music and shouting by drunk people, also made her feel upset and could not fall asleep.

Another Chinese interviewee (009) also pointed out:

They always held a party on weekends, talking loudly in the corridor, playing loud music, and made a terrible mess in the kitchen.

Several students admitted that they didn't have any difficulties adjusting to the new cultures but might have some problems adjusting to different people. Just as an Indian interviewee (008) stated:

I think it is not easy to adjust to different social groups. I am a kind of straightforward person and usually express my ideas directly. It's a challenge for me to deal with some people, especially those hypocritical ones.

In addition, the lack of genuine friendships with host nationals still exists in this stage. Some participants admitted that they spent much more time with international students than locals. Students from the same country formed their groups, and both groups had limited friendships with each other or with the host community. Besides, transportation difference is another issue for those international students. An interviewee from China (006) illustrated that the booking system of train tickets was so complicated, and she had to ask a friend for help, as she said:

In my home country, I could cancel or change the ticket at any time and get a refund; however, the system is quite different here, and it is inconvenient. Moreover, sometimes I have to transfer twice on a single journey, especially with a cheap train ticket. It is easy to get lost, particularly to us new students.

Additionally, half of the interview participants also stated the insufficient location signs and too many hilly roads. For example, a student from Vietnam (005) recalled:

When I back to my accommodation from university, I need to take a bus, I always get off the bus at the wrong station, and I'll always get lost. It looks the same everywhere in such a country road, and it's different for me to recognize it.

Besides, an Indian participant (008) also complained about his awful bus-taking experience because of the hilly roads:

One day I want to go shopping by bus. It was the first time for me to use public transport in the UK. There were many curves and turntables on such a hilly road, which made me feel dizzy and sick.



Furthermore, the financial issue was another challenge that international students often mentioned in their sociocultural adjustment process. Most of the students were self-funded. Out of the 16 interviewed, 12 students felt they had enough money for their daily and study expenses. However, they were concerned about their families' support and how much they spent every day, which indirectly caused their financial pressure and might influence their daily life and academic studies. For example, a participant from South Africa (010) suggested:

Everything here is much more expensive than in my home country, and there should be more scholarships for international students or additional financial support.

Another interviewee from Vietnam (011) also reported that although he received a part of the university's funding, it was still far from what he needed. Similarly, a Canadian student (013) who had working experience before came to the UK agreed:

Although I earned enough money before, the daily costs were beyond my budget. I saved as much as I could after I came here, just in case.

Many participants began to struggle to adjust to the climate as winter came and often rains, especially for those who came from a tropical country. A Vietnamese student (001) shared her ideas:

It's freezing, which is more than I could afford. I've never lived in such cold weather before.  
It's a challenge for me.

Another interviewee from Indonesia (007) agreed that the cloudy days made her feel upset. She often caught a cold because of the weather.

In general, according to the student's comments in the second stage of sociocultural adjustment, which is summarized in Table 6.6, as they were now living in the UK for five months, with the in-depth living experience, more and more problems emerged, positive comments decreased during this stage.

Table 6.6 Comments on sociocultural adjustment in the second interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
More familiar with the host environment Interact with the students from their home country	Drinking culture or accommodation environment Adjusting to different group of people Making friends with locals Transportation difference Financial issue Weather

### ***Third stage sociocultural adjustment***

By the third stage, interview participants were nine months into their programs. In contrast to the academic adjustment, sociocultural adjustment seemed less significant to the third stage students. They paid more attention to their academic studies and reflected little on the sociocultural issues. Students commented relatively negatively on their sociocultural adjustment in this stage.

Several students admitted that their sociocultural experiences were perceived to be limited by academic workload issues. For instance, a Vietnamese student (001) claimed that she was isolated to some degree as she worked very hard, didn't have too much social life, and seldom went out. An interviewee from China (009) also agreed that she didn't have enough sociocultural experience:

Since I came to the UK, I studied at university and then back home. I am busy with my studies.

Similarly, an Indian participant agreed:

I am not here for the holidays. I have intensive academic work and have no time. It seems that my sociocultural experience is quite limited.

Interestingly, another interviewee from Japan (004) pointed out that she tried to adjust to life here but failed. She was very busy and did not want to leave the safe zone, as she said:

I have enough friends and do not want to try something new and make a change.

Some students took part in extracurricular activities, such as various societies or activities at the beginning of their program. However, with the increasing academic study pressure, some of them quit these activities and concentrate on their study. For instance, a participant from India (015) who used to be enthusiastic about going to the baking societies said she didn't go there for a long time because it was a waste of time. Although she was interested in such activities, she had to give up and spend more time on her academic work. Besides, a Chinese student (003) shared the same opinion:

I have too many things to do this semester, such as writing assignments for three modules, preparing for the dissertation, and writing a proposal. I must learn to set priorities and make decisions. After careful consideration, I decided to quit the societies and devoting myself to studying. I don't regret the decision so far.

In addition, there were a few interview participants who never joined any societies, expressed their ideas at not taking part in those non-academic activities. For example, a female interviewee from Vietnam (005) admitted that she would try if she had another chance to experience what society was. Some students admitted that the main purpose for studying abroad was to get the best possible degree, as a Chinese participant (009) stated:

While asking me whether I regret not joining any extracurricular activity, I would say no. I may lose something, but I'll make it up on the others.

Besides, 10 interview participants indicated they were worried about adjusting to their previous life when they returned to their home country. They had to back to the familiar environment after living in different surroundings for a significant period. It was crucial to the international students. For instance, a participant from China (003) mentioned:

I was quite worried about back to my home country. I got used to the relatively slower pace of life here and unsure if I could handle everything in such a fast-paced environment.

A Canadian interviewee (013) who had previous working experience in her home country said:

Going back home seems to be a more challenging move. I'll be happy to be home, but I wonder if I could adjust back, especially from student status to working condition. I need to wake up in the early morning again.

Additionally, several students, particularly those from tropical countries, pointed out that they were afraid if they could adjust to the hot weather while backing home. Just as a Vietnamese participant (001) highlighted during the interview:

I am not sure if I could still afford the hot weather after going home.

7 out of 16 students mentioned their part-time working experiences in the UK at this stage. The majority of the interviewees who had that kind of experience held positive attitudes towards it. Some interviewees admitted that their job was directly related to their course of study or their intended future career. For instance, a Vietnamese participant (005) mentioned the experience of being a research assistant. She became more familiar with the research methods, which benefited her academic work. An interviewee from America (014) said:

I think the part-time work experience could enhance my future employability, as I could practice more during this period.

What's more, another Chinese student (003) felt regret not doing a part-time job. She said that she found that the relevant working experience was significant when she applied for a job online. The working abroad experience could help her become competitive in such a competitive job market, even though it was only a part-time job. Some of the students reported that their time management skills were enhanced due to their working experiences. As a participant from France (002) mentioned during the interview:

I don't think the part-time job is a kind of a waste of time. Instead, I deem it a way to release myself from the heavy academic work, which could improve my study efficiency and help me manage the time better.

Moreover, a few students illustrated that seeking a part-time job could reduce their financial pressure. An Indonesian interviewee (007) pointed out that the salary was high compared to her home country, and by doing so, she could achieve a desired standard of living and buy what she wants. Furthermore, some other interviewees indicated that doing a part-time job offered them a chance to interact with the locals. For instance, a Thai participant (012) admitted that although he did a so-called unskilled job as a checkout operator in the student union, his language proficiency improved a lot during that time. He had to communicate with both colleagues and customers every day.

Moreover, 14 out of 16 international students indicated that they also wanted to travel when they decided to study in the UK. According to their comments, the students reported at least one trip they had taken in the last nine months, short breaks up to 2 nights were more common. Despite living in the UK for such a long period, international students' selection of travel destination was similar to that of other international tourists. The top three destinations mentioned by the interviewees were London, York, and Edinburgh. For the reasons why they chose these places, different students held different ideas. For instance, a Chinese interviewee (006) said:

London is a diverse and exciting city with some of the world's best attractions, signs, and activities. There are always good reasons to visit, and there is always something new to see and enjoy.

Besides, several students who reported York or Edinburgh as their destination mostly cited that they were not far away from the city which they live, which enabled them to go in the morning and come back in the evening. It was time-saving. However, as the weather improved and the busiest time of their academic work was over, many interviewees revealed that they would have a relatively long trip either in Europe or within the UK. An interviewee from Indonesia (007) stated:

I will have more free time during the dissertation stage and be more flexible in using my time. Therefore, I plan to travel to the south part of the UK. I've never been there as it is far away from my city.

The findings also reported students' plans at this stage. 6 out of 16 students described their interests in staying in the UK, whether to pursue a PhD Degree or find a job. A student from Vietnam (001) indicated that the modules she studied, and her part-time working experience had encouraged her to prepare for a proposal to apply for the PhD Degree.

To sum up, in this stage, as it was already at the end of their teaching period, there was less interest in learning English or interact with others. Instead, a focus on planning for the future increasingly became a concern. The difficulties for sociocultural adjustment experienced by these students in this stage were related to readjustment to their home country or lack of connection with their old friends. The challenges could be distinguished from internally and externally. Some could be solved as time went by, whereas others remained throughout their stay. There were some things that they cannot change and some things that they were not willing or prepared to change. Few participants still deemed themselves as 'passer-by' and regarding their sociocultural experience as a temporary adjustment. These students admitted that they didn't care a lot about whether they could successfully adjust to social life. They could avoid the difficulties by communicating with the students from their home country.

Table 6.7 Comments on sociocultural adjustment in the third interview stage

<b>Positive comments</b>	<b>Negative comments</b>
Friendship	Limited by academic workload
Part-time work experience	Quit extracurricular activities
Travel	Lacking communication with old friends
	Readjustment to their home country

## **6.2. Social contact and friendship networks**

### **6.2.1. Quantitative findings**

The questionnaire surveys introduced in this research consist of questions about who you interact with most often and who were your friends to evaluate international students' social contacts and friendships. Table 6.8 and 6.9 present the relevant findings that reveal the frequency, valid percentage, and ranking orders.

Table 6.8 Quantitative data on social contacts

Item	Frequency	Valid percent	Rank
1. Students or people from my home country	41	40.2	1
2. Students or people from different countries but with similar culture to mine	20	19.6	2
3. Students from different countries	16	15.7	3
4. British students	15	14.7	4
5. British people (non-students)	10	9.8	5
Total	102	100.0	

Table 6.9 Quantitative data on friendship networks

Item	Frequency	Valid percent	Rank
1. Students or people from my home country	57	55.9	1
2. Students or people from different countries but with similar culture to mine	14	13.7	2
3. Students from different countries	12	11.8	3
4. British students	12	11.8	3
5. British people (non-students)	7	6.9	4
Total	102	100.0	

It was revealed from Table 6.8, international students interacted most often with the students from their home country, followed by the other international students, especially those with similar cultural backgrounds. It also reinforced the results that there was still limited interaction between international students and the host nationals.

Similarly, the findings in Table 6.9 showed that most of their friends were those from their home country, followed by those from a different country but share a similar culture and other international students. Only a few of the participants admitted that their friends were British, either students or the locals. It might be because the students found it challenging to build or maintain positive relationships with the host nationals (see section 6.2.2.). For institutional reasons, the university needs to recruit more British students, especially in those international student-dominated programs. Additionally, by comparing two tables, another interesting finding was that the students make clear distinctions between those they often interact with and their friends. For instance, although some international students interact most often with other groups of people, such as other international students or British students, while talking about their friends, they agreed that most of their friends were those from their home country.

The findings from questionnaire surveys general support the interview results (see section 6.2.2.).

### **6.2.2. Qualitative findings**

During the past nine months, most interviewees expressed the importance of supportive social contact or interactions with their friends, classmates, students from their home country, other international students, or the locals. For instance, a participant from America (014) reflected:

My interaction or relationship with both my friends and the locals is pretty good. I have many friends from various countries and often hang out together.

#### ***Contact with host nationals***

A majority of the students in this research expressed a strong desire to interact with the host nationals. However, only a few interviewees expressed a deep or extensive level with them. For instance, some participants discussed the significance of forming social relations with people from British culture to learn more about it and improve their language proficiency. Just as a Greek (016) interviewee stated:

I wanted to know more about them. It was so different from the Greeks. Therefore, I tried to make friends with them and understand their beliefs, values, traditions, and thoughts.

Moreover, an interviewee from Greece (016) shared her experiences:

Making friends or having more interactions with the local people could help me adjust to UK life faster and better.

Another Indian student (015) believed that getting involved in the local life and making British friends might be the easiest way to adjust to the new life. They should be an insider instead of an outsider.

However, developing friendships with UK nationals was repeatedly described as ‘difficult’ for various reasons. Firstly, communication and involvement were major problems that the student faced in the first interview round due to socio-cultural differences, such as cultural background or social behaviours. For instance, a Chinese interviewee (006) recalled that his communication with other native students after class was limited to daily greetings. He felt a little bit shy to engage in a relatively long conversation because he was not confident about his accent feared being laughed at. Two participants from Japan (004) and Vietnam noted:

Sometimes I feel confused about my classmates’ jokes whenever we get together. People around laughed happily, except me. I don’t feel as if I belong here.

I still remember that time when one of my classmates told us a joke, all the others got it and begun to laugh, but they soon realized I didn't follow them according to my puzzled expressions. Therefore, they stopped talking and tried to explain it again and again. I know they were kind and helpful, but I felt so embarrassed and seemed to disturb others on such an occasion.

Interestingly, a Chinese student (003) also mentioned this situation and had her solutions; she admitted that not to disturb others, whenever she couldn't understand their jokes, she just laughed along with others, hide confusion, and pretended to understand. Although it was not a good idea, it might be the only way to make everyone feel comfortable. Secondly, differences in lifestyle were mentioned as the main difficulty in the second stage. A Chinese interviewee (009) shared her ideas and reported that it was challenging to have a genuine friendship, especially with the host students. They have their social circle, and it wasn't easy to integrate into it:

Some of my friends came here, and they were shocked why British students like parties so much. I think it may be because of the culture change, and it wasn't easy to acculturate themselves.

Similarly, a male student from Thailand (012) agreed that unlike friendships with those from the home country who cared for each other, the interactions with locals were superficial to a degree, which seemed impossible to get into their lives. A Vietnamese interviewee (001) admitted that their friendship with locals was often limited to the classroom setting, not as strong as their relations with those from their home countries.

Interestingly, 4 out of 16 interviewees indicated that they didn't experience such difficulties; they were from Canada, America, France, and Greece. They all have something in common: a high standard of English language ability or previous travel or living experience. Just as an American student (014) said:

I visited the UK before, and both of us have a similar culture to a degree. I am familiar with it and don't have too many difficulties making friends with them.

Moreover, tracking participants' statements over the past nine months indicated that their stay's length didn't result in a positive interaction with British people. However, they expressed a lack of contact instead. The comments such as 'I seldom interact with British people' or 'I lack British friends' were mentioned several times in all the interview stages. In contrast, the extent of contact with host nationals remained the same during the three interview rounds. Taking the following two participants as examples (see Table 6.10).



Table 6.10 Contact with host nationals over time

Participants	Frist stage	Second stage	Third stage
001 (Vietnamese)	I met some British students during the induction week, and I will try my best to make friends with them.	I think I am underestimating the difficulty in interacting with the locals, but I won't give up.	Although I have some interactions with the British students, our relationships remain superficial.
003 (Chinese)	I hope I could have some British friends later.	I found it is quite difficult to make friends with the locals	I tried to interact more with the locals, but till now, I didn't have any British friends.

To sum up, despite their original perception that overseas studies might positively affect their personal development, such as understanding more about British cultures or improving their language ability. Their contact with the host nationals was superficial and relatively short, even if some opportunities were provided. Therefore, due to lacking contact with the local British people, the students tend to interact more with their peers from their home country.

#### ***Contact with other international students***

Based on the interview findings, international students' contacts with other international students were, on the whole, less significant to the students' social experience and sometimes easily being neglected to a degree. They seldom mentioned their experiences related to interacting with that group of people. While asking the reasons, some participants admitted that the local students and students from their home countries were the first choice. The local students would help them become more familiar with the local culture and easily adjust to the new environment. They felt a little bit easy to communicate with the students from their home country. Therefore, as the group of other international students didn't have any of these advantages, they also neglected social contacts. Although only a few of the students mentioned the relationships with other international students during the three stages interview rounds, their comments were relatively positive compared to their interactions with British people. Among all the other international students, those who shared more similarities were easy to build close relationships. For instance, a Vietnamese participant (001) reflected that she interacted more with the Asian student than the others because they experienced similar differences and had less pressure when talked to the other international students. In addition, two participants reflected that although they had to speak English with other international students, they felt comfortable and relaxed compared with the locals and would not worry about whether they pronounce accurately or it's grammatically correct. They usually had a trip, went shopping, or ate a meal with them, and shared or learned different cultures from

each other. For example, a student from Thailand (012) talked about his friendship with other international students:

I have made a lot of friends all around the world and experienced different cultures. I like to talk to them and share experiences.

A participant from Japan (004) also added that built up relation with other international students could make up for lack of contact with local students and improve their cultural awareness.

Moreover, students from English speaking countries such as Canada and America reported positive relations with other international students and insisted that they could experience difference culture and build international social networks.

To summarize, students' comments related to interactions with other international students were quite limited, and they admitted a lack of motivation to make friends with them.

Therefore, to make sure whether this phenomenon only existed among the 16 interviewees and avoid overgeneralization, the questions relevant to the frequency of contact with other international students were also included in the questionnaire surveys (see section 6.2.4).

### ***Contact with Co-nationals***

Interviewees' comments on contact with students from their home countries were overwhelmingly positive. Many of them said that people from the same country were helpful, and some of them also stressed the significance of friendship quality, just as an interview participant from China (003) said:

After going through a lot of things, I don't think I need too many friends. I need those who really care about me and who I trust with.

When they arrived in the UK, some of the students made friends with those from the same country. They thought the students who had the experience ahead were very helpful with life support, such as telling them where to buy food, opening a bank account, or preparing for the festival. For instance, a Chinese student (009) said:

At the time when I came to the UK, it was almost a mid-autumn festival. We usually celebrate it with our familiar members. Luckily, I met many Chinese students after arriving here, and we soon decided to celebrate it together. They made me feel at home.

However, there was a conflict between the desire to practice spoken English and the panic produced by immersion in a new culture. As a Vietnamese interviewee stated:

In the first few weeks, I constantly interact with Vietnamese and spoke Vietnamese. I know we need to practice English more but spoke our native language made us feel safe and secure in the new environment.

In addition, the students felt quite satisfied while talking about their experiences of interacting with students from their home country during the second stage. They admitted that it was much easier to start a friendship with people who shared the same culture and mother tongue. Just as an interview participant from China (006) commented that all his social activities outside the university were in the Chinese community, this was quite general among most students. One female student from Japan (004) commented:

Although I interact with others by joined some activities, most of my daily interaction was still with Japanese students. I remained in a close relationship with them but seldom get in touch with my local classmates.

Similarly, a Chinese interviewee (003) also said that she preferred to interact with the Chinese students because she was less intended to speak English.

Besides, several interviewees mentioned supportive friendships or helpful interactions with their friends from the same country in the third stage. Some of the interviewees said that the friends they made when they first arrived in the UK with whom they kept in touch till now.

As two Chinese participants (009) and (006) admitted:

We know each other since we came here to the UK, it's been a long time. I know they are both trusted and trustworthy. For me, they are more like family, not just friends.

Whenever I met difficulties, the first person I think of is the one I met during the induction week. I know she would help me, not because she is also from China, but because she is the most familiar.

However, some other students expressed negative attitudes towards their interactions with others. For instance, a Chinese interviewee (003) illustrated her opinions while confiding a secret to others:

Although I have many so-called friends, we could go shopping together, have fun together, or do other things. However, I don't trust them, except my boyfriend. I could share everything with my boyfriend, and I know he could keep it secret. But I could not guarantee others could do the same.

Another participant from Vietnam (005) expressed a different attitude towards her boyfriend. She reported that the only thing that had not changed dramatically throughout the year was her boyfriend's contact. All her spare time with him provided her with familiarity, making her

feel comfortable and safe. However, it prevented her from building a new social network, which had negative on her sociocultural adjustment in the long run.

Overall, 10 out of 16 interviewees reported more interactions with the co-nationals than the others throughout the adjustment process. Interestingly, all the interview participants from China were included. Table 6.11 illustrated some typical examples.

Table 6.11 Contact with co-nationals over time

<b>Participants</b>	<b>First stage</b>	<b>Second stage</b>	<b>Third stage</b>
<b>004 (Japanese)</b>	I have many Japanese friends and we met each other in the societies.	Sometimes I spent the time with my Japanese friend and sometimes I tried to make friends with the local students	As the academic pressure increased, I have no time to make new friends, I only contact with my Japanese friend when I am free.
<b>006 (Chinese)</b>	I made a lot of Chinese friends since I came here.	I usually hang out with my Chinese friends; we have many things in common and I really enjoy the time with them	My Chinese friends helps me a lot, and I spent most of time with them, they are trustworthy.

Participant (006) also mentioned that he met many Chinese students studying at the same University online before his arrival. They built a WeChat group and chatted quite often. Therefore, by the time he arrived here, he already built friendship networks with some Chinese students and spent most of his time interacting with them. Their friendships last for a long time.

Moreover, less interaction with their old friends in their home countries was another issue pointed out by several students. Since they moved to the UK, the contacts with their friends dissolved. Just as a Chinese interviewee (006) mentioned:

The longer I stay here, the less common topics I have with my friends in China. It seems that there is a growing distance between us, and I feel like I am losing them. It is a fact, but I don't want to accept it.

Furthermore, although their interaction benefits a lot, it also bought about some negative influences. For instance, several participants insisted that they decided to study abroad because they want to change the learning environment and improve their language ability. They did not wish to interact with the students from their home countries during their stay in the UK and hope they could live in a more British way. Interestingly, in terms of those international students from English speaking countries, they mentioned that although they had interactions with the students from their home country, they didn't spend long time or rely too much on them.

In general, the students recognized the benefits of relations with the co-nationals, based on a shared mother tongue and culture, making it easier for daily communication and interaction. They regarded their contact with the co-nationals as a safe zone and didn't want to leave it and make a change. According to the findings, contact with co-nationals seemed to play an important throughout their whole adjustment process. Whether they had just arrived in the UK or just became familiar with the local environment. They appeared to support each other emotionally and practically, which compensated for the lacking contact and support with British students.

### 6.3. Evaluation of sociocultural satisfaction over time

The purpose of this section is to evaluate international students' attitudes towards their sociocultural experiences in the past nine months. The participants were asked to measure how satisfied or dissatisfied they were based on their own situation via a six-point Likert-type scale and the interviewees were asked to describe whether and why they were satisfied with their sociocultural experiences.

#### 6.3.1. Quantitative findings

Students were asked to measure their sociocultural experience through a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely agree), in all the three questionnaire surveys. A one-way ANOVA with repeated measures was used to evaluate international students' sociocultural satisfaction over time.

Based on the findings from descriptive statistics (see Table 6.12), the degree of sociocultural satisfaction was rated as the highest (M=4.85) in the first stage, then decreased to 3.58 in the second stage and then to 2.85 in the third stage. Post hoc analysis revealed that the degree of students' satisfaction was statistically reduced from the early days of their study to the end of their taught period ( $p < .0005$ ). Figure 6.1 also revealed that students' level of sociocultural adjustment decreasing as time went by. Their satisfaction dropped promptly from the beginning of their study (T1) to the beginning of their second semester (T2).

Table 6.12 Descriptive statistics of sociocultural adjustment satisfaction

Items	Stages	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall sociocultural adjustment satisfaction	T1	4.85	1.05
	T2	3.58	1.01
	T3	2.84	1.02

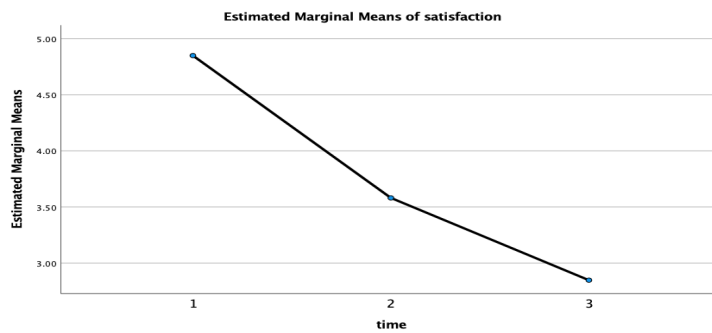


Figure 6.1 Sociocultural adjustment satisfaction over time

### 6.3.2. Qualitative findings

Most of the participants mentioned that they were satisfied with their sociocultural adjustment in the first stage. For instance, a student from America (014) stated:

I am very satisfied with my sociocultural experience at the moment. I know quite a lot of friends and experience something new.

However, from the second survey, the degree of international students' satisfaction declined. They were not very satisfied with their sociocultural experiences at that time, especially in the second stage. Three-quarters of the students expressed their dissatisfaction as many challenges began to arise at that time, which seemed to be difficult for them to overcome. For instance, an Indian participant (008) mentioned:

I am not satisfied with my sociocultural experience in this stage compared with the previous one. As time went by, I encountered various cultural differences, which I didn't expect before came here.

Moreover, in terms of the third stage, they still admitted that they were not happy or satisfied with the sociocultural experiences. For instances, a Chinese student (006) interpreted his opinions in detail:

I am not so happy with my sociocultural experience. The main reason is that I don't have enough time to do that. If I have more time, I will try something new. I have to spend most of my time on academic studies to catch up with others. The main purpose is to study, and I don't want to be distracted by other things.

In general, the results from interviews were in line with one-way ANOVA findings (see section 6.3.1.). Both results indicated a high level of satisfaction in the sociocultural domain at the beginning and decreased over time.

#### **6.4. Sociocultural suggestions**

Based on their previous sociocultural experience (see section 6.1), nearly all the interview participants had suggestions regarding their own experiences for future international students. Some of them suggested joining student societies or other activities to enrich their lives and meet more people. Some participants suggested the international students travel more places within the UK and around Europe. And some others advised trying their best to enjoy daily lives here, as long as it doesn't affect their academic studies. For example, a participant from France (002) suggested:

I think the international students should adjust themselves deeply and not deem it a burden. Instead, enjoy themselves in the new culture. Don't be afraid to make a change. Leave their comfort zone, and they will have discoveries.

In addition, a participant from South Africa (010) stated:

I think the international students need to speak English more often, try to speak it out, and not feel disappointed if you speak something wrong.

Moreover, previous results in sections 6.1 and 6.2.4. indicated that international students usually spend more time with students from their home countries. Therefore, 10 out of 16 interviewees suggested the significance of finding more opportunities to engage with the local people and people from other cultures and expand their social network, avoiding always staying with students from their home country. As a Canadian student (013) said:

I would suggest them to have more interactions with the British people. It's a good way to understand their culture and would boost the sociocultural adjustment process at the same time.

Moreover, the most interesting suggestions were from two Asian students (005, 009) students, as they suggested not pay much attention to the sociocultural experiences. A student from China (009) revealed that there was no need to waste plenty of time on the sociocultural experience. They only stayed here for one year and it would be better to concentrate on the academic study.

In general, the students' comments could be categorized the suggestions for adjusting to the new environment and improving self-capacity. It was important for the international students to notice the differences between their home culture and host culture. Although the suggestions might vary from person to person, they all provided references for future international students.

## 6.5. Summary

The research findings showed that the students were not very satisfied with their sociocultural experience after nine months of study in the UK. Most of the students were positive in making friends or involved in various social activities at the early adjustment stage. However, as time went by when the academic study was more intense, several students gave up the sociocultural activities and focused on their studies. Interestingly, few interviews deemed their sociocultural adjustment as a temporary adjustment. These students admitted that they didn't worry about adjusting the life or making friends with the locals. They could avoid these difficulties by interacting with those from their home country. Some of the other students expressed concerns on readjustment issues to their home countries, such as reentering their previous works or adjusting to the different weather.

The findings also showed that most of the students tended to contact, join activities with, or seek help from their home countries. They admitted that it was much easier to build a friendship with the students who shared the same culture spoke the same language. Although most students held optimistic attitudes toward local culture or local people, they still preferred to maintain their traditions or lifestyles. According to the findings, some of the students expressed a strong desire to interact with the host students. However, they found it was challenging to maintain contact or friendships with the hosts. Besides, the findings found a significant influence of university support services for students' sociocultural adjustment, such as the welcome week services, accommodation and reception services, and student advice services.



## Chapter 7. Findings: Psychological and overall adjustment

This chapter present results regarding to the psychological adjustment. Both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaire surveys were used to measure international students' psychological experiences in each stage as well as how it changes over time. Two measurements were introduced, including scales of psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life (see section 3.5.3.). The findings are presented according to the following sequence: First, psychological adjustment experiences in each stage from both quantitative and qualitative phase are summarized and investigated (7.1), following by evaluation of psychological adjustment over time (7.2) and psychological suggestions (7.3), then, findings regarding overall adjustment are provided (7.4.), following by results from the U-curve hypothesis (7.5) and a summary (7.6).

### 7.1. Psychological adjustment experiences in each stage

#### 7.1.1. Quantitative findings

##### *Psychological wellbeing*

Psychological adjustment was measured via scale of psychological wellbeing. This scale was introduced into all the three stage surveys so as to track changes over time. It was a six-point Likert-type scale which including 18 items, scores for each item range from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). Findings were described as follows (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Quantitative data on psychological wellbeing

	Means of Agreement / Disagreement		
	T1	T2	T3
<b>Items with even positive experience as time went by</b>			
I have been missing my friends in my home country.	4.31	3.75	3.26
I have been missing my home.	4.45	3.92	3.46
I have worried about the impression I make on other	4.15	3.47	3.30
I have worried about being at university in general	4.30	3.77	2.90
<b>Items with even negative experience as time went by</b>			
I have worried about love or intimate relationships with others	2.90	3.48	3.77
I have liked my classmates	5.03	4.12	3.92
I have liked my roommates	4.64	3.92	2.90
I have liked my social life	4.85	3.98	3.25
<b>Items remain roughly the same</b>			
I have felt angry	2.25	2.05	2.12
I have felt lonely	3.30	3.28	3.26
I have felt depressed	2.90	2.85	2.93

Levels of Agreement /Disagreement: 1 – Completely Disagree; 2 – Mostly Disagree; 3 – Slightly Disagree; 4 – Slightly Agree; 5 – Mostly Agree; 6 – Completely Agree

The above findings present the factors related psychological wellbeing over the past nine months, showing that the students had both positive and negative adjustment experience to the host country and the host environments. According to Table 7.4., the internal factors, such as missing their friends or friends, worried about the impressions or being at the university, became better as time went by. Because most of the international students agreed that as their academic study was getting more and more intense, they had no time to missing their family or friends (see section 7.1.2.). Additionally, in terms of the items with relative negative experience were those external factors, including the intimate relationships with others, their attitudes towards the classmates, roommates as well as their social life. It is quite similar with the qualitative findings, just as a student from Vietnam (005) stated:

At the beginning, when we were not familiar with each other, my roommates were very polite. However, as time went by and a deeper understanding with each other, conflicts broke out.

Interestingly, factors which associated with their personal mood, such as loneliness, depressions or anger stayed roughly the same with nine months period, which indicated a strong self-control ability of the international students. Just as a Canadian interviewee mentioned:

Sometimes when I felt depressed or angry, I would do something else to distract myself so as to adjust my mood as soon as possible.

### ***Satisfaction with life***

The satisfaction with life scale was adopted in all the three-questionnaire survey to measure international students' psychological adaptation. It was a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Completely inapplicable) to 6 (Completely applicable) and students were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction based on their own situation.

Table 7.2 Quantitative data on satisfaction with life

Degree of satisfaction	Frequency			Percentage		
	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
Completely satisfied	33	26	36	27.5%	24.1%	35.3%
Mostly satisfied	41	42	30	34.2%	38.9%	29.4%
Slightly satisfied	24	21	16	20%	19.4%	15.7%
Slightly unsatisfied	13	10	10	10.8%	9.2%	9.8%
Mostly unsatisfied	7	6	8	5.8%	5.6%	7.8%
Completely unsatisfied	2	3	2	1.7%	2.8%	2.0%

According to Table 7.2, most of the international students were at least slightly satisfied with their life in the three stages, suggesting that the main domains of their life were going well. Compared with the first stages, the number of the students who were extremely satisfied with their life reduced slightly at the second stage (at the beginning of their second semester) then recovered at the end of their taught period (third stage). Only a few of the students felt completely unsatisfied with their life across three waves of questionnaire surveys, which was similar to findings from interviews (see section 7.1.2)

### **7.1.2. Qualitative findings**

#### ***First stage psychological adjustment***

As the interviews were conducted at their early stage in the UK, due to the different adaptive capacities, international students' psychological experiences varied greatly by individual, which seemed to become polarized. Some of them held highly positive attitudes towards their psychological experience, whereas others had a relatively negative view. Only a few interviewees commented neutrally.

In terms of their feelings of leaving home, a majority of them had mixed feelings. Some students used the words 'stress', 'nervous' while describing their feelings when they were going to leave their home countries. They admitted that all that stress was caused by fear, fear of the unknown, and uncertainty. For example, a Japanese interview participant (004) said:

I felt nervous at that time. Because for me, studying abroad means that I have to leave the familiar environments and start again. I don't know what the future holds and whether I could adjust everything there.

In addition, a student from Vietnam (005) stated that she was quite nervous before coming to the UK, as she was not sure whether the people she met were friendly and helpful. Luckily, those feelings had disappeared when she arrived in the UK.

In contrast, some other students reported different feelings. They said that they felt excited and got ready to start a new life in the UK. As an interviewee from Vietnam (011) recalled:

It is the first time for me to study in a new country, I feel very excited. I have prepared for a long time and cannot wait to go there. It seemed that my dream is finally coming true.

Another Canadian participant (013) also mentioned:

I thought I was ready to go there at that time, I don't have feelings of anxiety or nervous, I believed that I could adapt myself to different circumstances.

After their arrival, some of their feelings had changed. Frequently mentioned issues included loneliness and homesickness in this stage. Some of the interviewees said that they were isolated and helpless when they arrived in the UK. For instance, a Thai participant (012) talked about his experiences:

I felt very lonely when I arrived here, no friends, no acquaintance, I did everything by myself.

Similarly, a student from China (003) also described her feeling of missing home. Some students also pointed out that the cold weather also affects their moods and leads to depressions, especially those from tropical countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, and India. Just as a Vietnamese interviewee (005) reflected:

I used to live in a country with continual sunshine all year round. The gloomy weather here doesn't agree with me and usually makes me feel depressed.

Another participant from Indonesia (007) agreed:

I don't like the weather here, it always raining, and always disrupt my plan and make me feel upset. I miss the sunny days in my hometown.

Moreover, financial stress was also mentioned by a few students. For instance, a participant from South Africa (010) noted:

I felt pressures of the life here, the prices are very high in Britain compared to my home country.

However, 10 out of 16 interviewees shared positive attitudes psychological experiences after their arrival. A majority of them admitted that the adequate preparation they made, and peers' and friends' support would help them adjust to the new environment easily. For example, during the interviews, several participants, especially those from English-speaking or European countries, such as the USA, Canada, France, or Greece, revealed that they solve the psychological issues by themselves and felt confident enough to handle them. A French (002) participant mentioned:

After I am arriving here, in order to reduce homesickness and loneliness, I tried to open up to meet more people deliberately. Although I still miss home sometimes, I don't feel lonely anymore because of them.

Another student from America (014) also shared her ideas of how to conquer psychological issues. She stated:

I like to watch comedy. It makes me laugh happily, and I will forget any annoyance.

Besides, the expressions such as 'excited' were mentioned several times by this group of people and some other students. As a Canadian interview (013) recalled:

I felt excited when I came to here. I used to study in a small town, which is completely different from here, everything is new to me. I am so happy and satisfied with the life here.

Another participant from Greece (016) also described how excited she was after arriving here:

The reason why I decided to study in the UK is that I travelled here before. I like this country so much. Therefore, this time is not just about learning. It's more like visiting an old friend. I feel really excited.

Additionally, several participants from Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, or Japan indicated that their home country's students provided them with emotional support, especially those who arrived earlier. As a Chinese interviewee (003) stated:

I met some Chinese students when I arrived here, they came here earlier for attending the pre-session English classes, they shared their own feeling of loneliness at the beginning and encouraged me that there were lots of students with the same feeling. I felt relaxed and believed that I could solve it.

Additionally, they also admitted that their family and old friends in their home countries provide them with emotional support. A participant from China (003) said that she chatted with her friends and parents in China almost every day to reduce her homesickness.

To sum up, a number of the interviewees reported positive psychological experiences in the first stages. Although some negative expressions such as stress, loneliness, and homesickness were frequently mentioned, they could be solved whether on their own or others' help.

Interestingly, the students from western countries, such as the USA, Canada, France, or Greece, were more confident in dealing with the psychology issues by themselves. In contrast, the interviewees from Asia appeared to rely on the help of others largely. The participants' critical issues in this stage were related to the weather and financial difficulties, and they also emphasize the importance of personal relationships and interactions with others.

Table 7.3 Comments on psychological adjustment in the first interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
<p>Felt excited and got ready to start a new life in the UK.</p> <p>The adequate preparation they made as well as the support from peers and friends helped them a lot.</p> <p>Those from English speaking countries felt confident enough to handle the psychological problems.</p> <p>Students from their home country and their old friends helped them a lot.</p>	<p>Felt 'stress 'or 'nervous' while talking about leaving home.</p> <p>Loneliness and homesickness.</p>

### ***Second stage psychological adjustment***

The second stage interviews were taking place at the beginning of the second semester in February. At that time, the students were five months into their program and experienced many matters, such as difficulties in academic writing, critical thinking ability, or language. Therefore, the students commented more on their psychological well-being at this stage and seemed to feel worse than the first few weeks in the UK. Unlike the previous stage, where psychological issues were mainly focused on the sociocultural domain, their comments were relevant to the academic studies as pressure increased in this area. Words such as 'pressure,' 'annoyed,' 'anxiety,' 'self-doubt' were mentioned frequently during the interviews.

In terms of the various negative factors, English language ability was most mentioned by international students. They said that when they could not understand what the teacher said or failed to keep up their pace, they felt annoyed and depressed. For example, as an Indian interviewee (008) said:

The teachers spoke so quickly during the class, I missed a lot. It makes me feel so anxious. The more I thought about it, the more depressed I became. It seemed that I got into a vicious circle.

Another student from China (003) also mentioned:

The failure of keep up with the teachers during the class makes me feel worried. I am afraid that it might influence my academic achievement. I hope it could be solved as my English language ability improved.

In addition, 7 out of 16 interview participants indicated that pressures increased when assignment deadlines approached, whether they had finished their assignments or not. For

instance, a Japanese participant (004) reported that whenever the deadline was coming, she felt nervous, although she completed it a week ago. There was still a feeling that it was not good enough and she couldn't get the expected grades. An interviewee from Vietnam (001) also had the same feeling. She thought it might be lacking confidence:

I was so nervous before submitting my assignments. I worried about many things, such as whether I met the teachers' criteria, whether they would enjoy this article, or whether I could do any other thing to make it better. However, my friends suggested not overthinking, be confident and try the best.

Those who were busy finishing the assignments also had a feeling of nervousness and anxiety. As a Chinese participant (006) noted:

I am a kind of person who usually makes an effort at the last moment. I seldom arrange the time reasonably. Thus, while the deadline was approaching, I felt so nervous and worried about whether I could submit it on time.

Luckily, by the second interview stage (at the beginning of the second semester), most of the students had formed a stable relationship with their friends, classmates, teachers, or tutors and commented positively on the support provided by them. Participants from Vietnam (011), Indonesia (007) and Canada (013) mentioned how they got emotional support from the regular meeting with personal tutor or friends:

Our personal tutor was very supportive. She emailed me with concern and told me that I could email her whenever I needed help.

Sometimes when I am in a bad mood, especially when I met academic difficulties, my friends usually comfort me and cheer me up. They helped me a lot and made me feel I am not alone.

One of my British friends invited me to celebrate Christmas with their family. I was so moved and had a wonderful time. There were lots of good memories.

Overall, the second interview's comments emphasized academic issues that affected their psychological well-being, including English language ability or the approaching of deadlines. In general, most of the participants seemed not to adjust moderately to the new environment. Participants experienced their first assignment period during this time and using the words 'nervous' and 'anxious' to describe that tough time, but they believe that everything will get better soon.

Table 7.4 Comments on psychological adjustment in the second interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
They commented positively on the support provided by their friends, classmates, and teachers.	<p>Words, such as ‘pressure’, ‘‘annoyed’, ‘anxiety’, ‘self-doubt’ were frequent.</p> <p>Sometimes when they could not understand what their teacher say or failed to keep up their pace, they felt really annoyed and depressed.</p> <p>Their pressures were increased when the deadline was approaching</p>

### *Third stage psychological adjustment*

During the third stage interviews, the students were nine months into their programs of study. Their psychological experience was quite different from their previous one. A frequently mentioned issue related to psychological adjustment in this stage was the concerns for their future. Some of the participants expressed their hesitation about whether to find a job or pursue PhD study. As a Chinese student (009) mentioned that she couldn’t reach an agreement with her family:

My mom said that a master’s degree is enough to find a good job in my hometown and insisted that it is unnecessary to spend several years doing a PhD. It’s a waste of time. But for me, I am interested in doing research, especially in my current field. I don’t know how to persuade my mom; it annoys me these days.

Those who had previous working experiences also expressed their concerns about whether they could re-enter the job market successfully and become more competitive. An interviewee from Canada (013) said she was pretty confused about whether to go back to her old job or find a new one:

Finding a new job means that I should start from scratch. My previous working experience became useless. I have to compete with others without any privilege. However, if I go back to my old job, although I familiar with every process, it seems a little boring.

A majority of the interview participants admitted that as they became more familiar with the academic study and the local environment, the level of anxiety and nervousness reduced. For instance, two students from India (015) and Thai (012) mentioned:



Though these months, I have the peace of mind that comes with knowing what is going on. I became more confident in controlling emotions and tried my best to make them not interfere with my life. I did it.

I've been here quite a long time, became familiar with my programs, teachers, and classmates. I could arrange time better and seldom feel worried or anxious. I think I improved a lot in adjusting my moods.

In addition, as the increasing pressure of academic study increased, the degree of loneliness and homesickness appeared to reduce. The students threw their heart and soul into their academic study, attended various classes and seminars, read more books, and prepared assignments and proposals, which made them not leave enough time to consider their psychological conditions. For example, a student from China (009) said:

I was clear what to do since I came here. My only goal is to achieve better academic performance; therefore, I won't let any other things affect it, especially my mood. It's better to keep with a positive frame of mind all the time.

A Vietnamese interviewee (001) also recalled her experience and used the phrase 'busy but happy' to describe her recent feelings:

I was so busy during this period, and I think that busyness solves all the troubles. I have no time to miss my family or feel lonely, as I am studying day and night to write my assignments and prepare a proposal to apply for a PhD.

Besides, several participants also highlight the emotional benefits of having a positive close relationship with friends, classmates, or family members who could support them and make them feel secure during the third interview round. They also said that the students who shared a similar cultural background made it easier to establish emotionally close relationships. Different from the results in the first stage, several participants only reported their family of origin's significant role in psychological adjustment and indicated that less and less emotional support from friends in their home country. Despite the long-distance, participants deemed their family as their most powerful backing and a source of encouragement. As Indonesian (007) and Canadian (013) participants stated:

They helped me out whenever I feel disappointed. After I call them and talk with them, I feel much better. They help me a lot emotionally.

My family usually encourages me when I am assailed by self-doubt or encountered some difficulties whether in academic study or social life.

Whereas in terms of their old friends, the students who used to speak highly of them in the previous stage revealed that they seldom receive emotional support from them as time went by. For example, a Chinese student (003) noted:

We have little contact recently, lacking common topics and the time difference made us more and more isolated from each other. Sometimes when I felt upset, I couldn't contact them easily due to the time issues.

Apart from getting emotional support from others, some interviewees revealed their beliefs and dreams helped them to overcome the difficulties and deal with the negative feelings. As two participants from South Africa (010) and Thailand (012) said:

At the beginning, the heavy burden in academic studies made me feel upset. I wanted to quit and give up, but my dream kept me to stay here and keep going. Now I think I could make a balance between them and didn't feel nervous anymore.

If I believe I can do it, I will.

Furthermore, according to the interview findings, only one student reflected the significance of the counseling center. As a Greek participant (016) mentioned:

I was quite upset due to the feedbacks of my assignments. I made an appointment and went to the counseling center. The staff was nice and listened carefully. The pressure was released, and I felt better.

Interestingly, one Vietnamese student (005) pointed out that the experience of breaking up with her boyfriend was a profound emotional shock, as she said:

I broke up with my boyfriend this month, I felt my heart was broken, and it makes me so sad. I know I had to do a lot of things, but I was not in the mood. I think it might be the long road back to recovery.

To sum up, as it was at the end of their taught period. Some students paid more attention to their futures, whether to find a job or apply for a PhD, whether to try a new job or return to the old one, were vital for them and might affect their psychological wellbeing at the same time. During this stage, most of the students were busy with their academic studies and had no time to care about other things; their emotions were relatively stable and had no obvious changes. Family and friends still played significant roles in providing the students with emotional support and help them maintaining physical and psychological health.

Table 7.5 Comments on psychological adjustment in the third interview stage

Positive comments	Negative comments
The level of anxious and nervous reduced.	Their hesitation about whether to find a job or pursue PhD study.
The degree of loneliness and homesickness have been reduced.	Seldom receive the emotional support from their old friends.
Benefits of having a positive close relationship with friends, classmates or family members.	Breaking up with their boyfriend/girlfriend was a profound emotional shock.

## 7.2. Evaluation of psychological satisfaction over time

International students' psychological experiences were evaluated through a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 6 (Completely agree), in each stage questionnaire surveys. A one-way ANOVA with repeated measure was then adopted to measure participants' psychological satisfaction over time.

According to the results from descriptive statistics in Table 7.6, international students' psychological adjustment satisfactions were very high, with small variations across three stages. The Mean scores for the first and third adjustment stage remained the same (M=4,.47), whereas the second one was a little bit low (M=4.46). The results showed that students' psychological adjustment satisfactions were significantly changed during the nine months ( $p<.0005$ ).

Table 7.6 Descriptive statistics on psychological adjustment satisfaction

Items	Stages	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall sociocultural adjustment satisfaction	T1	4.47	0.75
	T2	4.46	0.76
	T3	4.47	0.73

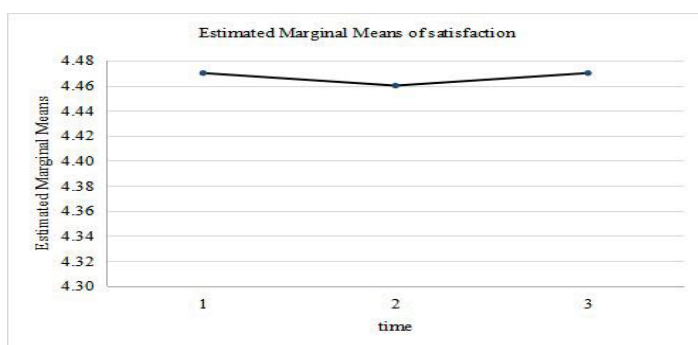


Figure 7.1 Psychological adjustment satisfaction over time

According to Figure 7.1, although it seemed that there was little change between each stage (only 0.01), which revealed that their psychological satisfaction stays stable in the nine months.

### **7.3. Psychological suggestions**

The interview participants had various suggestions regarding their own psychological experience for future international students or the others.

According to the findings, it could be divided into the suggestions for the students themselves as well as the suggestions for the universities and the staffs. In terms of the suggestions for the students, some of the participants suggested trying to interact with others and to avoid always staying at home. As a student from Vietnam (011) said: 'I suggest international students joining different societies because it is really a good way to meet people. The more frequent you interact with others; the less lonely you will feel.' An American interviewee also stated: 'I would suggest them trying to go out, open their hearts and make more friends. By doing this, you will not feel alone and could reduce your homesickness.' Some participants suggested that they should make a balance between leisure and academic study, going out with their friends from time to time instead of studying all the time, so as to reduce stress and anxious. A Japanese student (004) shared her opinions: 'I think international students need to combine academic work with leisure, do not worry too much about the assignments, and leave a happy studying-abroad memory.' Whereas several other interviewees suggested that international students should keep busy to forget annoyed trifles and maintain a good mood. Interesting, only one Vietnamese interviewee (005) suggested about the romantic relations, she said that it would be better if the international students did not start a romantic relationship with others in the UK. It would not only affect the academic performance, but also largely influence their psychological wellbeing.

In addition, for the suggestions to the universities, some interviewees suggested that the university should widely knowledge and popularizing the university's counseling service, such as sending group emails to the new arrivals, or putting billboard on the campus. Because they reflected those international students seldom know this service, let alone use it. For instance, a student from Vietnam (006) stated: 'I think the university should find ways to attract the international students to use this support service. It is useful, but many of them never heard about it.' Some other students suggested that the personal tutors should care more about their psychological issues, and help them to conquer the problems, rather than only pay attention to their academic difficulties.

To sum up, these suggestions were all came up with based on their own psychological experience. Therefore, it was crucial for the international students to concern about their psychological wellbeing, as it might affect both of their academic and sociocultural experiences. Therefore, the suggestions mentioned above could be valuable for the future international students during their adjustment process and would help them to have a better overseas studying experience.

## 7.4. Overall adjustment

### 7.4.1. Overall adjustment satisfaction

The same six-point Likert scale was used in every stage survey to measure students' overall overseas study experience, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). A one-way repeated measure ANOVA was conducted to find whether there were statistically differences in students' overall adjustment over nine months. Based on the descriptive statistics in Table 7.7, almost all international students in this research were generally satisfied with their study-abroad experience in the UK.

There were no outliers, and data were normally distributed. The assumption of sphericity was violated, as assessed by Mauchly's test of sphericity. Adjustment satisfaction changes significantly over time ( $p < .0005$ ), which increased from 3.55 to 5.13 (from the beginning of their study to the end of taught period).

Table 7.7 Descriptive statistics on overall adjustment satisfaction

Items	Stages	Mean	Std. Deviation
Overall adjustment	T1	3.55	0.81
	T2	4.34	0.72
	T3	5.13	0.81

Besides, as shown in Figure 7.2, the satisfaction increased gradually from the first stage to the third, which is quite similar to the overall academic adjustment satisfactions (see Figure 5.1). Therefore, to find any association between overall adjustment and academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment, a correlation was introduced to identify whether these associations were significant (section 7.4.2).

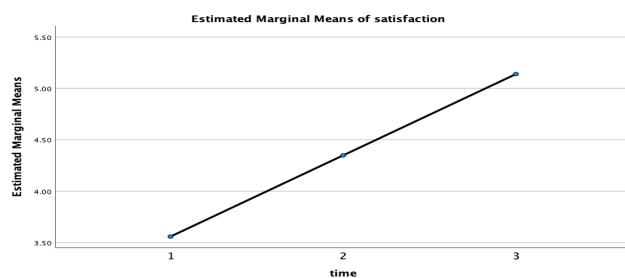


Figure 7.2 Overall adjustment satisfactions

#### 7.4.2 Associations between some selected variables

This section interprets the correlations between overall adjustment and some other adjustment variables, such as academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment. It was claimed that these relationships could better understand international students' adjustment experiences over time.

##### *Associations between academic adjustment and overall adjustment in each stage*

The correlations between academic adjustment satisfaction and overall adjustment satisfaction in each stage (Table 7.8) found that the Pearson correlation coefficient were .78, .74, and .72, respectively.  $p=.000$  indicated strong positive linear relationships between academic adjustment and overall adjustment in every stage. This result suggested that the two variables do covary, and if the students were more satisfied with their academic adjustment, the more satisfied they would be in the overall adjustment.

Table 7.8 Correlations between overall and academic adjustment in each stage

Stages	Correlation coefficient ( $r$ )	$p$
T1	.78	.000
T2	.74	.000
T3	.72	.000

##### *Associations between sociocultural adjustment and overall adjustment in each stage*

A Person correlation was run to determine the relationships between sociocultural adjustment satisfaction and overall adjustment satisfaction in all three stages. There were very weak, positive correlation between these two variables in the first and second stages ( $r= .047, .074$ ) and weak, negative correlation in the third stage ( $r= -.015$ ), which were all not statistically significant ( $p>.05$ ). It also showed that whether international students were satisfied with their sociocultural adjustment would not affect their overall adjustments.

##### *Associations between psychological adjustment and overall adjustment in each stage*

According to the findings, the correlations between psychological adjustment and overall adjustment were found very weak in each stage ( $r=.119, -.042, \text{ and } -.014$ ). There were no

significant results at the 0.05 value (all the p values were above 0.05). Therefore, the level of students' overall adjustment would not be affected by their psychological well-beings.

The above findings were consistent with the results in qualitative interviews. Most of the students agreed that whether they were satisfied with their overall adjustment was determined mainly by their academic performance. If the students felt satisfied with the academic adjustment, they were more likely to be happy with their overall adjustment. It might be because while talking about their overall adjustment experience, many of them were directly related to their academic adjustment and neglecting their psychological adjustment. Some interviewees admitted that the primary purpose of pursuing overseas study was to have better education. Therefore, the degree of overall adjustment satisfaction mainly depended on their academic adjustment process. They said that they didn't care a lot about adjusting to social life successfully in the UK, which would not affect their overall adjustment satisfaction. Besides, most students didn't face serious psychological issues throughout the nine months, and no one during the interviews mentioned this point.

#### ***Associations between academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment in each stage***

The correlations between academic satisfaction and sociocultural adjustment satisfaction in each stage (Table 7.9) found that the Pearson correlation coefficients were .75, .76 and .74 respectively.  $P=.000$  showed that there were strong positive relationships between academic adjustment and sociocultural adjustment in every stage. These results indicated that students' degree of satisfaction in sociocultural adjustment was affected by their academic experiences. The result strongly supported the qualitative findings during second and third stage interviews (see section 6.1.2.) that international students' satisfaction of sociocultural adjustment decreased due to the increasing academic pressure.

In terms of the correlations between academic and psychological adjustment in each stage, the Pearson correlation coefficients were .73, .75, and .74,  $p=.000$  showing strong positive relationships between academic and psychological adjustments in each stage. The findings indicated that students' psychological satisfactions were strongly related to their academic adjustment. This result was consistent with the findings from qualitative interviews (see section 7.1.2.) that international students' psychological adjustment was largely influenced by academic performance, and it was adjusted according to the academic progress.

Table 7.9 Correlations between academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment in each stage

Associations between selected variables	Stages	Correlation coefficient ( <i>r</i> )	<i>p</i>
<b>Academic and sociocultural adjustment</b>	T1	.75	.000
	T2	.76	.000
	T3	.74	.000
<b>Academic and psychological adjustment</b>	T1	.73	.000
	T2	.75	.000
	T3	.74	.000

***Associations between sociocultural adjustment and psychological adjustment in each stage***

A Person correlation was adopted to investigate relationships between sociocultural and psychological adjustment satisfaction in all the stages. The findings indicated the positive correlation between the two variables ( $r=.045, .053$  and  $.061$ ), and were all not statistically significant ( $p> .05$ ). The results showed that international students’ satisfaction related to sociocultural adjustment didn’t affect their psychological experience in the current study.

**7.5. The U-curve hypothesis**

This section investigates the actual changing process of international students’ academic, sociocultural, psychological, and overall adjustments. Visual graph questions (Figure 7.3) were designed for the participants to test whether the U-curve hypothesis applicable or supports any adjustment process. The visual graph questions were introduced into quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews in the third stage.



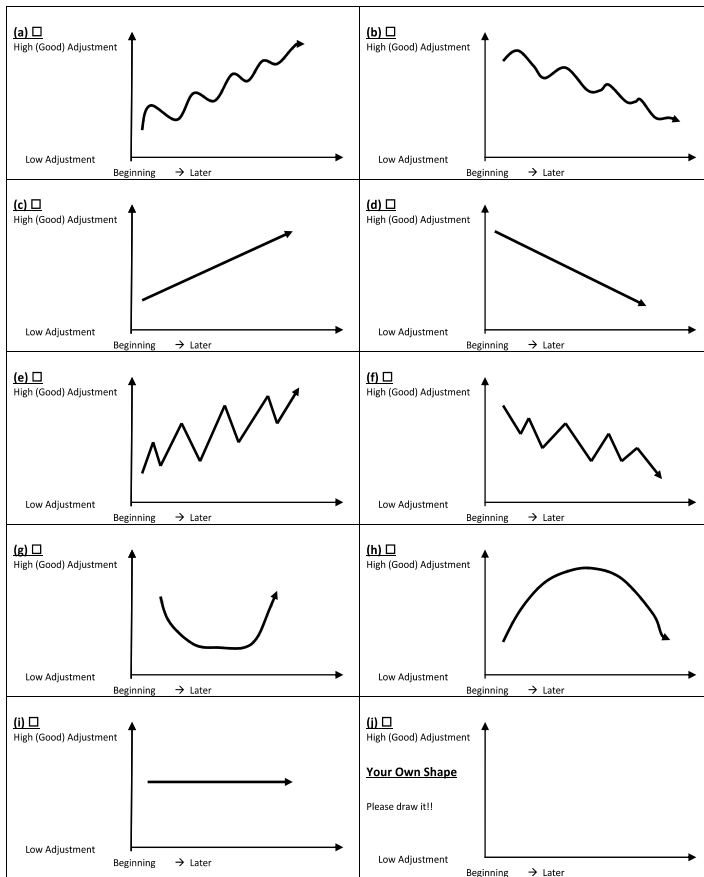


Figure 7.3 Visual graphs for adjustment

Table 7.10 Information on each graph

Domains	Number of participants in each graph									
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
Academic adjustment	61	1	22	0	3	0	5	0	10	0
Sociocultural adjustment	3	60	3	8	2	8	11	1	6	0
Psychological adjustment	4	2	3	2	8	2	22	0	59	0
Overall adjustment	28	0	28	0	26	0	10	0	10	0

### 7.5.1. Graph evaluation on academic adjustment

In order to investigate international students' actual adjustment process, a visual graph (Figure 7.3) was designed for questionnaire participants. This graph aims to use the visual expression to accurately examine their adjustment process to avoid any verbal expression ambiguity.

In terms of their academic adjustment, a vast majority of respondents did not choose the U-curve graph, which indicates that most of them did not think that the U-curve hypothesis could describe their academic experience. In the third stage questionnaire survey, 61 out of

102 students chose graph (a) as the most suitable one to express their academic adjustment experience. This graph indicates that despite the ascending of the process in general, some small fluctuations might move up and down due to occasional difficulties.

Additionally, 22 out of 102 participants chose graph (c) to interpret their academic adjustment process. For the other participants, 10 chose graph (i) as the most appropriate one, especially those from English speaking countries and familiar with the education system. Interestingly, only 5 students chose graph (g), which resemble the U-curve hypothesis, 3 students chose graph (e), and only 1 participant chose graph (b), the decreasing curve as the representative for their academic adjustment process.

### **7.5.2. Graph evaluation on sociocultural adjustment**

In terms of their sociocultural adjustment, only 11 international students chose graph (g), the one which is similar to the U-curve hypothesis. It reveals that most of the questionnaire respondents did not perceive their sociocultural adjustment as a pattern following the U - curve hypothesis. Instead, more than half of the students agreed that graph (b) represent their adjustment process and interpret their sociocultural adjustment as an overall descending, but with small waves throughout the process (see graph b). In addition, 8 participants in total chose graph (a), (c), (e), the general ascending curve to represent their sociocultural adjustment, these participants were from countries such as America, Canada, France and Greece.

Besides, nearly 6% of the respondents deemed their sociocultural adjustment as a graph (i), without any changes throughout the nine months. The qualitative results could be interpreted, as some of the students neglected their sociocultural adjustment process and only focused on the academic studies. Only 9 students chose graph (d) to show their sociocultural adjustment.

### **7.5.3. Graph evaluation on psychological adjustment**

Regarding psychological adjustment, nearly half of the participants chose graph (i), a straight line to describe their adjustment experience, which was consistent with the findings from psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life (see section 7.1.2.) indicating the fact that many of these students didn't have serious psychological problems and usually maintain a calm state of mind. In addition, 22 out of 102 respondents chose a U-curve graph to present their process, as they encountered some academic difficulties during the second stage and felt a little bit stressed. Moreover, some other students chose graph (e), the one with great fluctuation, to show their psychological process, according to the previous qualitative findings (see section 7.1.3), it might be due to the fact that some international students, especially

those who have intimate relationship with others, were easily to be affected by their boyfriends or girlfriends.

#### **7.5.4. Graph evaluation on overall adjustment**

The visual graph (Figure 7.3) was also used to measure international students' overall adjustment. According to the findings, the choice of a graph (a), (c), (e) is equally distributed, which accounts for above 20%, respectively. This result revealed that whether their adjustment process is smooth or not, in general, the international students' overall adjustment followed an ascending trend. Additionally, although 5 out of 102 students chose graph (i) to describe their adjustment process, none of the questionnaire survey participants select a descending one, indicating that the respondents were quite satisfied with their overall adjustment experience. Besides, in terms of the U-curve graph (graph g), only a tenth of the students used it to interpret their overall adjustment process.

#### **7.5.5. Reflecting on the U-curve hypothesis**

In order to find whether the U-curve hypothesis is still applicable to the adjustment experiences in the three domains (academic, sociocultural and, psychological), the visual graph questions were also introduced in the third stage interviews, the students were asked to interpret the reason why they believe that kind of graph could fully present their adjustment process. Only 4 out of 16 participants admitted that the U-curve hypothesis could describe their academic, psychological or overall adjustment process to a degree. Still, no one said that it was suitable for the sociocultural adjustment. Among the four international students, an interview participant from China (006) admitted that the U-curve hypothesis was quite similar to his academic and psychological adjustment processes. It was his first time studying overseas. He encountered some academic difficulties felt stressed at that time. However, his sociocultural and overall adjustment processes were like a line increasing gradually from the beginning of his study to the end of the teaching period. Similarly, another Indian interviewee (008) also thought his psychological adjustment process followed a U-curve. Still, the other three domains didn't resemble that due to his high expectations for overseas education. Besides, a student from Vietnam (005) agreed with the U-curve hypothesis and said that it fitted both her academic and overall adjustment process but not for her psychological adjustment. She admitted that this contradiction was due to her awful romantic relationship. Her psychological adjustment process went down since the second stage interview. However, the other interviewees (12 out of 16) didn't agree with the U-curve hypothesis or didn't believe that the U-curve could describe or fit any of their adjustments, especially their sociocultural adjustment process. Some of them revealed that they experienced an adjustment

that is better than the U-curve hypothesis. For instance, some students said that cultural similarity was one of the vital contributors. As interview participants from Canada (013) and France (002) said:

The reason why I could adjust to the new environment successfully is owing to the cultural similarity. There are fewer differences within the culture, and I do not have any language issues. I don't think my adjustment process could be described via the U-curve model. Instead, it is more like a horizontal line, with a high starting point and a consistently high standard (013, Canada).

I came from another European country; I have many relatives here and quite familiar with everything in the UK. Therefore, I don't have a so-called honeymoon or frustration period (002, France).

Besides, previous visiting or studying experience in the UK also made the participants more familiar with the environment and easily adjusted to the new environment. For instance, a Vietnamese student (011) shared her own experience during the interview.

I was quite familiar with the culture and the environment as I used to study in another British university as an exchange student during my undergraduates. Thus, I don't think my adjustment could be fully described by the U-curve hypothesis, as I don't feel things here are new and could make me feel excited.

Another interview participant (015) also agreed with it and said that her sociocultural adjustment is relatively constant and there is no change throughout the nine months. Moreover, some participants admitted that their adjustment process is even more complicated than the one described by the U-curve model. For example, as an interview participant from Vietnam (001) said:

I don't think any of my adjustment experiences could be described by the U-curve hypothesis. It is a complex process and hard to be told in words.

Besides, 4 out of 12 students revealed that they gave up their sociocultural or psychological adjustment with increasing academic pressure. Therefore, the U-curve hypothesis was not applicable for their adjustment process. As two Chinese interviewees stated:

I don't care much about the issues related to the sociocultural or psychological problems as time went by. I have to concentrate on my academic studies and have no time to interact with others. Therefore, I think my sociocultural adjustment process could be described as a descending line rather than the U-curve hypothesis (009, China).

I deemed my adjustment a temporary adjustment; its effect won't last long, and I will go back to my previous life when I return home. For me, all the adjustment processes look like a stable line, without fluctuation and change, stay steady all the time (003, China).

Moreover, previous working experience or maturity also affected one's adjustment process, thus, made their adjustment pattern. For instance, a Canadian interviewee (013) who disagreed with the U-curve model said:

I have worked for two years. It made me mature. I didn't feel frustrated or anxious when I encountered some difficulties in the new environment. Instead, I could handle them easily. Therefore, the U-curve hypothesis, including a period of 'crisis,' doesn't suit me.

An interview participant from Vietnam (011) interpreted the reason why none of his adjustment processes fitted the U-curve hypothesis was due to his personality:

I am not the kind of person who would like to refuse new things or culture. On the contrary, I want to try something new. As I didn't hit any particular low points as an international student, the U-curve hypothesis model could not fully describe my adjustment process.

## **7.6. Summary**

According to the findings, most of the students seemed quite well-adjusted and satisfied with their lives. Major concerns such as 'loneliness' and 'homesickness' in the early teaching weeks, 'pressure' and 'anxiety' at the beginning of second semester were reported. Major concerns for international students' psychological wellbeing related to homesickness, poor language proficiency and academic achievement. This research also found a strong association between international students' psychological wellbeing and their academic performance. Some students admitted that the feelings of stress or anxiety reduced dramatically when they submitted their assignments and achieved good results. Adequate emotional support from their family, teachers and friends was also deemed as a significant factor in dealing with their wellbeing problems. Most of the students tended to share feeling with those from their home country and felt relax and comfortable after talking with them. Besides, the findings suggested that the students who were good at adjusting their mood felt more satisfied with their psychological adjustment experience. Finally, findings showed that the U-curve hypothesis's model was not well fitted to the full-time, taught postgraduate international students in humanities and social sciences, as the complexity of the students' experience could not be captured or described a simple pattern.

## **Chapter 8. Discussion**

This chapter discusses the results that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data. It begins with the discussion on students' motivation and expectations (8.1.) followed by discussions of academic (8.2.), sociocultural (8.3.), and psychological (8.4.) adjustment over time. Then social contact and friendship networks (8.5.), other issues regarding adjustment (8.6.), and the model of U-curve hypothesis (8.7.) are also presented, followed by a summary (8.8).

### **8.1. Discussion of students' motivations and expectations**

This research investigated international students' changing attitudes from their beginning of the program to the end of their teaching period to understand how their motivations might change and how their expectations evolved within nine months. The aim of investigating these issues was to find what underpinned or hindered their adjustment process.

#### **8.1.1. Motivations for pursuing overseas study**

In order to find out why international students, plan to pursue overseas study, two common theoretical bases, the push-pull model (see section 2.1.3.) and the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation (see section 2.1.3.), were introduced.

In terms of the push-pull model, it was used to explain various factors that would 'push' and 'pull' international students to leave their home country and study abroad. (Chen, 2007). In this study, one of the merits of using the push-pull model is that it is easy to investigate the decision-making process in two domains, factors that push them to leave their home country and characteristics that pull them to study a specific destination. Therefore, based on this model, in this research, personal or family-related factors (including influence from their previous study, travel experience, or friends), as well as financial issues (such as receiving funding from the government or the universities), are the push factors that motivate the international students to leave their home countries to pursue overseas studies, whereas the value of overseas study (including study in a world-class university or be aware of international and cross-cultural perspectives) is the only pull factors which attract them to study in the UK.

Within the expectancy-value model, the main component is achievement-related choices and performance (Eccles, 2005), Therefore, based on the theory and the context of the research, this study found that international students were more likely to enroll in a study abroad experience if they thought they could succeed or if they had positive impressions of a similar previous experience. The advantage of adopting the expectancy-value model is that

motivation's multidimensional nature is considered by examining various factors (Wigfield et al., 2017), such as whether their experience of studying abroad is pleasant or whether they think the program they choose is useful in their future career. The expectancy-value model's problem is that it is mainly related to the students' emotional outcomes (Doménech-Betoret et al., 2017), such as their satisfaction, neglect the other objective issues, which is quite limited and overgeneralized. According to the findings, while talking about students' decisions, they mainly related it to their desire to pursue overseas education instead of having a positive experience previously.

After a comprehensive consideration and a weight of pros and cons of both theories in exploring motivations for pursuing overseas studies, it was clear that the push-pull model was better to explain the empirical findings of the research project, as the students were motivated by various internal and external factors and vast majority didn't have any study abroad experiences, let alone a successful overseas study experience. This section will focus on how the push and pull factors would affect international students' experience.

The current research aimed to explore international students' motivation for studying abroad and study in the UK. Some of the participants related it to academic or sociocultural reasons. According to both qualitative (see section 4.1.1.) and quantitative findings (see section 4.1.2.), students deemed overseas study values, such as studying at a world-class university, being aware of cross-cultural perspective and following a growing trend, as the primary motivators for pursuing overseas study from international perspectives. Interestingly, regarding motivations to study in the UK, the factors were interpreted at a national level from the geographical, historical, or cultural perspectives. In general, students' motivators were different according to different scope of research object (whether from international or local perspectives), it was empirically and strongly supported by the push-pull model.

### **8.1.2. Preparations for studying abroad**

Previous research defining study abroad as a process (Kruse and Brubaker, 2007), rather than an event, therefore, preparation usually begin much earlier than the departure. Unlike previous literature which indicated that international students' preparation process usually begin with receiving one or more pre-departure guides from their university, including information such as paying tuition fees, applying for student visa, travelling and arriving to the host university, and living in the host city (Bikos and Manning, 2019), in this study, students' preparation process were categorized into preparation period and determine process. The findings suggested that international students took a long time for preparation regarding the issues such as the cost of the programs, English language test and information relevant to

the host university, whereas the determine process was mainly related to the issue whether students' final decisions to pursue overseas study were influenced by others. The students also suggested that in terms of culture issues, more intense and systematic preparation need to be made so as to have a more profound overseas experience and a mere awareness of cultural differences, which is consistent to a previous research conducted by Kruse and Brubaker (2007). In addition, different from previous research which neglecting the significance of financial factors while making preparation (Humphreys and Baker, 2021), in the current study, some participants reported financial issue as influential factor to determine the length of their preparation period as they had to defer the offer and work one more year to make enough money due to the high tuition fees and living expenses in the UK.

### **8.1.3. Expectations before or while pursuing overseas education**

The findings suggested that adjustment is a complicated process that might be affected by various factors, which is the same as expectations. Some of the expectations remain the same before and after studying in the UK, whereas some changed a lot. Unlike their motivations to pursue overseas education, which seemed to be influenced mainly by sociocultural issues such as opportunities to travel, experiencing a unique experience or their previous study and living abroad experience, international students' expectations were related mostly to the academic aspect. Only a few of them talked about their sociocultural expectations. Academic expectations could be divided into expectations for themselves (such as their achievement in the academic context) and their expectations for the others (such as their teachers, classmates, or the university's support service). Most of the students held optimistic views towards their expectations and were filled with anticipation in general. According to the results, it is very common for international students to have expectations while studying abroad. These expectations affected their study or life plans and influenced their satisfaction in various aspects during the adjustment process. Although some expectations led to good results, there were still some other expectations that had negative effects on their personal feelings and adjustment process. For example, in the third stage interviews, while talking about the overall academic adjustment process, some students admitted that it would be better if they didn't come with such a high expectation, as sometimes these expectations would cause heavy pressure and anxiety and turned to be the opposite of their wish. This result was broadly consistent with a study carried out by Yan and Berliner (2011), which suggested that expectational pressure placed on them to excel academically, high expectations to perform well in school, and the fear of failure create extreme stress and anxiety for the international



students themselves. Therefore, the association between the proper level of expectation and its subsequent positive adjustment experience could be enlightenment for the future search.

## **8.2. Discussions of students' academic adjustment over time**

As the main concern of pursuing overseas education, and a key component in the overall adjustment process (Poyrazli et al., 2001, Bastien et al., 2018), there is no doubt that international students need to adapt to the new learning environment. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data gained from the same group of students in three stages (October 2018, February 2019, and June 2019) provided a panorama of international students' academic adjustment process over time. Although all the students were from the same prior academic achievement (with 2:1 honor degree, or international equivalent), met the university's English language entry requirements, and studied programs similar in length. Different students had different opinions towards their academic adjustment process regarding their different experiences.

Previous research found that international students usually experienced considerable obstacles in adjusting to the UK academic environment and seemed to be particularly vulnerable compared to the home students (Gebhard, 2012). In this study, most interview participants had a relatively positive academic performance and adjustment experience during the past nine months. Most of them have in common a prominent feature because the participants experienced most academic difficulties in their early stages when they were not familiar with the host country's education system and teachers' requirements (section 5.1, 5.2). As time progressed, students became acquainted with the host university's rules and conventions. Thus, their academic experiences improved a lot (5.1.3). Besides, many of the students agreed that their academic outcomes met their early expectations. Although there is a lack of literature on the relationship between the expectations and academic achievement or whether their expectations would affect their adjustment (Yan and Berliner, 2011), this study showed that those who met their academic expectations at the end of their teaching period tend to feel more satisfied with the adjustment experience.

### **8.2.1. Stress and coping frameworks**

The research results found that international students generally held positive attitudes towards studying in a different environment. They adopted various coping strategies to manage the difficulties they encountered during the academic process. The findings revealed that most people preferred to confront the problems and find a solution directly. This copying strategy matches the coping-focused strategy first put forwarded by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in Transactional Stress Coping Model. It is one of the conceptual frameworks for understanding

the cross-cultural transition and adaptation (Berry, 1997, Ward et al., 2001). Previous literature defined coping as a dynamic process that fluctuates over changing demands and situations (Moos and Holahan, 2003), and proposed two coping styles based on their research, including problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. The former is a coping approach that addresses the problem with caused stress experience, whereas the latter refers to coping that arises from the stressful situation (Naz Böke et al., 2019). Several previous studies found positive relations between cross-cultural stress, emerging from difficulties such as language issues and academic problems, and students' motivations to cope with these challenges (Zhang and Goodson, 2011). As shown in the findings, students usually dealing with their academic difficulties by taking steps such as making preparation before class, reading materials in advance, or asking help from the teachers or the students from their home country.

These results are partly consistent with the findings of a study carried out recently with 100 Saudi international students in Sydney (Alsaahfi and Shin, 2017). The study suggested that students introduced various strategies to facilitate the adjustment process. Among them, the problem-focus strategy, such as time management, using available resources, was helpful. This research also found that students deemed their academic adaptation as a dynamic process with a positive development over time (Wang, 2018). They adopt various kinds of coping strategies regarding their circumstances, such as preparing for class, reviewing what they learned or seeking academic help from teachers. Several students admitted that they took plenty of time adjusting to their academic study (from the beginning of their program till the end of taught period) and felt more confident to talk about their opinions in class. However, the pace of academic adjustment varied from person to person regarding various factors, such as backgrounds or personal factors (Zhu, 2016).

### **8.2.2. Issues regarding students' academic adjustment**

Based on the data analysis, several issues were found regarding international students' academic adjustment. The findings in this study correlate with the previous literature on a number of aspects which deemed as difficulties for international students, such as self-regulation skills (van Rooij et al., 2018), English language ability (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019), critical thinking ability (Rear, 2017), and satisfaction and length of the chosen program (van Rooij et al., 2018, Chien, 2020). These issues are discussed separately as follows:

#### ***Self-regulation skills***

A significant finding was that self-regulation skills, such as time management or self-control ability influenced students' academic adjustment. It is important that the students were capable of regulating their study behavior as the high degree of self-regulation that university required in the UK was different from their undergraduate study (van Rooij et al., 2018). Therefore, according to the qualitative findings, good self-regulation would adjust more efficiently and achieve better academic results. Some students, especially those from Asian countries, admitted that teachers usually talked directly about what to do, unlike in their home country, in the UK, teachers provided less control, with a high degree of freedom instead (section 5.1.1). Under such circumstances, they had to decide what to do or how to do it. Thus, more responsibility and autonomy were needed.

### ***English language ability***

In general, English language ability was the most frequently mentioned issue throughout the entire adjustment process, especially those from non-English speaking countries. Previous literature showed that English proficiency had been found to affect the adjustment of international students (Olivas and Li, 2006, Schartner and Young, 2016, Alsaifi and Shin, 2017, Bastien et al., 2018), which might prevent the students from communicating effectively with the teachers and other students, following the instructions, understanding assignment criteria, and taking exams (Seyedali Ahrari et al., 2019).

Based on the research findings, other critical issues such as academic reading or writing, classroom involvement, or understanding the teachers were all related to English language ability, which were consistent with previous studies (Bastien et al., 2018). In terms of academic writing difficulties, some specific issues were mentioned by previous research, including passive learning experiences, lacking purpose, or routine memorization (Shaheen, 2016). However, findings of this study showed that the issues related to academic writing were reduced at the end of their teaching period. Only a few students mentioned that they still have difficulties in this area, whereas critical thinking ability remained the main difficulties after nine months of study in the UK. Some interviewees said it might be that fact as a time-consuming learning process, critical thinking ability was challenging to learn and acquire within such a short period. Besides, they always think in their first language and then translate it into English, which would affect their expression of thought. Once they develop their thinking, their English language ability is more likely to develop (O'Sullivan and Guo, 2010, Shaheen, 2016).

### ***Critical thinking ability***

Except for the language issues, culture or curriculum differences were also another significant factor that would affect their academic adjustment in the current project. For example, this study's research findings revealed that international students from western or English-speaking countries (America, Canada, France, and Greece) were quite familiar with the learning skills, such as critical thinking, compared with those from other parts of the world.

Studies also revealed that in some countries, especially Asian countries, the intellectual skills of comparing, evaluating, arguing, and critically presenting one's own opinion are not fully developed, students rely on rote learning and passive learning (Durkin, 2008). Lacking critical thinking capability is frequently deemed an essential factor in successfully performing (Bastien et al., 2018). The results found that most of the international students couldn't develop their critical thinking ability in such a short period. Few students even doubt the essential practicability of thinking ability as she planned to back to her home country after graduation, and critical thinking ability seemed to be useless in job hunting. Besides, there were several critical thinking-related writing problems include lacking clarity, critical analysis, evaluation, or supporting evidence (Fell and Lukianova, 2015).

### ***Satisfaction and length of the chosen program***

Unlike English language or self-regulation skills, which could be positively influenced when the student already in the university, there was a lesser extent for them to change their satisfaction with the chosen program. This was in line with van Rooij et al. (2018) , who suggested that it seemed not much can be done if the students decided on a program that is not what they expected it to be and didn't match their interests, values, or abilities. In addition, the findings also revealed that the degree of the satisfaction was related to students' achievement, which was consistent with previous literature that students who were more satisfied with their program obtained better grades (Suhre et al., 2007).

Besides, many international students' one-year master's program in the UK was mentioned as an advantage regarding motivations for studying abroad. The relatively short study-period helped reduce both tuition fees and living costs and enabled them to enter the job market earlier. However, some students deemed the intensive workload on a one-year program a challenge in the academic domain. After nine months of study, several interviewees mentioned that one year to complete a master's degree was challenging. They insisted that a two-year program would be much better, as there was no rush, and they had enough time to adjust to the academic and sociocultural environment.

A relatively short program was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, students prefer the program with a shorter period, but on the other hand, they hope to learn more knowledge and to become proficient with it. This result is in line with a recent study conducted by Chien (2020) that a one-year master's program in British higher education is contradictory and controversial, as the students hope to study in a relatively short program but eager to learn more within such a short time. The finding in the current research also suggested that such an intensive program with a heavy academic workload also affected the quality of international students' sociocultural adjustment or engagement with the locals. Moreover, as the lack of formal practical study on such issues (Chien, 2020), the above findings make a significant contribution and could be discussed further in the future research.

### **8.3. Discussion of students' sociocultural adjustment over time**

The following section provides a discussion of international students' sociocultural adjustment over time. According to the findings, most of the students had a good impression of the UK and expected to have a rich and varied sociocultural life when they arrived here. They were very motivated to go to new places, different food, make new friends, and gradually know the city. However, as the in-depth living experience, more problems emerged and felt uncomfortable to adapt to the British lifestyle, such as drinking culture or accommodation environment, their sociocultural experience began to change.

They were more likely to interact with the students from their home country or the other international students than British students or the locals. These findings were consistent with previous literature that it was difficult for international students to make friends with local students (Campbell and Li, 2008), due to the fact that even if home students held relatively positive perceptions of international students, they were mostly uninterested in initiating the contact (Schartner, 2015). This phenomenon is defined as 'international student culture' by Wu and Hammond (2011), within this culture, there is a particular, but not exclusive, connection with students from the same or similar cultural backgrounds and continue interest in the students' events from their home country.

Although the early findings in this research suggest that one of the motivations for international students to pursue overseas study was to interact with the students from various countries and build global networks (see section 4.1.), however, interactions with other students or the opportunities to interact with others seemed limited, which is seldom supported by the previous literature (Yan and Berliner, 2011, Bastien et al., 2018). Some participants wondering whether it still necessary for them to interact with the locals as they could avoid adjust the life or making British friends by communicating with the students from

their home country. Similar examples raise concerns whether these students lacked curiosity to be involved in the local environment, or they rejected or gave up their sociocultural adjustment after some unhappy experience or thought it was a waste of time. Besides, a few students admitted that they gave up their sociocultural adjustment and put all their efforts and time into academic studies due to the time pressure.

Moreover, the findings in the third stage (at the end of their taught period) also revealed the issues about reentry or readjustment, which is usually defined as the transition from a foreign culture back into one's home culture (Hsiao, 2011). The finding indicated that some students were quite worried about return to their home country, the issues were mainly related to pace of life, weather, shift in friendship and general peer interaction. Besides, there was an inverse relationship between successful adaptation overseas and reentry difficulty. In other words, students who easily adjust to the host country might be faced with larger difficulties (Hsiao, 2011). When students return home, they may be unaware of the changes that have occurred in their previously familiar surroundings during their absence, as well as the changes that have occurred within themselves because of their study abroad experience. Therefore, they were also quite worried about whether their family or friends may not be prepared for someone who they familiar with but different in some aspects.

### **8.3.1. Personal agency**

Martin (2004) defines agency as 'the capability of individual human beings to make choices and act on this choice in ways that make a difference in their life' (p.135). Personal agency contains purpose, choice, and action (Walter and Gerson, 2007), and usually affected by context (Bandura, 2006). When choices are made, personal agency is exercised or brought into play (Walter and Gerson, 2007). The findings indicated that while dealing with academic adjustment, there was little choice for the students to decide whether to adjust or not. Still, regarding sociocultural adjustment, they had more power to make decisions. It also means that to meet teacher's requirements and achieve better academic results, international students often have less personal agency during the academic adjustment process. However, in terms of sociocultural adjustment, they had more freedom to make their own choice. The interviews also indicated that although several students avoided or refused to cope with sociocultural difficulties, the personal agency could still motivate or encourage them to perform well within daily social regulation.

The much greater personal free agency would lead the students to choose a more comfortable way with less stress and conflict during the sociocultural adjustment process. This might be a reasonable explanation for why many international students in the current study are inclined

to interact with the students from their home countries or other international students, as they usually share similar feelings of being in the same boat.

### **8.3.2. Cultural distance**

Several international students mentioned plenty of 'similarities' in various aspects between their home country and the host country, especially those from Europe or America. These similarities including the language, culture, food or traditions, and habits, which elicit a sense of familiarity (Huang et al., 2013). Such familiarity facilitates students' cultural adaptation, reduces perceived uncertainty and risk, and enhances their experience in a new culture (Liu et al., 2018). As a surprising discovery, this phenomenon could be explained by the concept of 'cultural distance.' According to Black and Gregersen (1991), the extent to which the home culture and host culture differ in cuisine, social conventions, weather, or rules would affect individuals' cultural adjustment. In the current research, students admitted that the two countries' similarities made them easily adjust to the host environment. It is in line with a study conducted by Bastien et al. (2018) that students from regions with more cultural similarities to the host country endorsed less stress and challenges than those from a more culturally distant area.

However, the cultural distance also caused some difficulties for those who shared fewer similarities. The finding revealed that among the dissimilarities, the most apparent factors regarding 'cultural distance' were related to the drinking culture and night-time socializing. As several students mentioned that it was quite different from their home culture, sometimes it made the students feel unsettled, and they were reluctant to join such activities.

It corresponds with a more recent study conducted by Ching et al. (2017), who found that the greater the distance between the native culture and the host culture, the more difficult it might be during the students' adjustment process. Moreover, the weather condition was another dissimilarity mentioned by some participants, especially those who came from tropical countries. The students admitted that they were not used to the cold weather, which was challenging for them.

### **8.3.3. Cultural identity**

Although the overseas study experience enables the students to be tolerant while encountering cultural differences (Wang, 2018), their cultural identity tends to be enhanced and maintained when they experienced differences in the sociocultural adjustment process.. According to the findings, international students experienced more complicated issues regarding their cultural identity, such as a conflict between an urgent need to adapt to British culture and the reluctance to lose their original identity.

This study found that although they adjusted to the host environment to a degree, their self or cultural identity changed a little after one year of research in the UK for some international students. They intended to keep or strengthen their self-identity, such as their home cultures, traditions, or values. For example, This finding is in line with previous literature results that international students tend to maintain and strengthen their identification with their home culture and beliefs (Sussman, 2011). They see themselves as a representative of home culture even if spending a significant amount of time abroad (Mao and Shen, 2015). Besides, lacking opportunities to interact with the home students or people was another factor that helped them keep their own identities in the current research.

Similarly, earlier literature also suggested that when the students' involved within-host nationals' social network and interact with them frequently, they would facilitate their assimilation process through learning and adaptation (Mao and Shen, 2015). Moreover, the findings also indicated that digital media use also affects their interaction with the hosts. Although they were physically in the UK, they were also virtually in their home country. They often immersed themselves in their home countries' social media environment, similar to the study conducted by Martin and Rizvi (2014).

They browsed their friends' social media photos and posts to keep up to date with what was happening and what they were doing in their home country, almost simultaneously (Sinanan and Gomes, 2020). However, this reinforcement of their cultural identity also makes them less adapt to the local culture. The reliance on their friends in the home country or co-national friendship groups hinders them from forming friendships with those from the host environment (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Furthermore, except for those who keep their cultural identity and refuse the sociocultural adjustment, the finding also showed that those who had positive sociocultural experience were a little bit worried about the reentry issues, such as readjust to the pace of life or whether in their home country or readjust to their previous work (see section 6.1.3.). Similarly, Kim (2001) also found an inverse relationship between successful adaptation overseas and reentry difficulty, which means that individuals who adjust to the host culture successfully or easily may have a greater problem during the reentry process (Hsiao, 2011). Additionally, cultural identity played a more significant role for international students in the sociocultural domain rather than in the academic adjustment, which might be the fact that unlike in the academic environment which focused more on the professional knowledge, the mainstream culture emphasized multiculturalism and diversity.



#### **8.4. Discussion of students' psychological adjustment over time**

According to the findings, international students were satisfied with their life and had relatively positive psychological adjustment experiences in general. Although few students mentioned several concerns such as homesickness and loneliness in the early stage (the beginning of their program), pressure, anxiety, or self-doubt due to heavy academic workloads at the beginning of their second semester, and the worries about their future (the end of taught period), most international students admitted that their psychological adjustment process seemed to be stable, without any obvious fluctuation.

Findings from qualitative interviews revealed that international students' psychological adjustment was affected by their academic performance to a degree. The stressors such as the approached deadlines or academic workload could sometimes trigger their negative feelings, which was similar to a study conducted by Bataineh (2013) investigated the academic stressors experienced by a group of 232 students at a Saudi university. Although students mentioned those factors during the interview, no one reported high-level stress or anxiety. They believed that as students, it is common to have a normal degree of stress, which could drive and encourage them to do things. This finding is consistent with previous literature. An adequate degree of pressure would make the students leave their safe zone, think about things differently and find solutions for the problems (Smith et al., 2003). Besides, findings in the current study pointed out that those who felt uncomfortable while speaking English might be struggled with their academics, and leading to disappointment, which was consistent with previous study conducted by Hirai et al. (2015) in the US. The study suggested that a better English language ability would predict positive psychological adjustment outcomes.

However, other the participants in this study held an opposite opinion, especially those from English-speaking countries. They insisted that their psychological difficulties didn't arise from the language ability and stressed the significance of self-regulation ability, which they mentioned in their academic adjustment process (section 8.2.3.)

Another interesting finding from this research is the possible relations between optimistic attitudes and psychological wellbeing. In this study, most of the students admitted that the more optimistic they were, the fewer mental problems they would face. This might be the fact that those who possess positive attitudes would be more effective in their psychological adjustment. A study conducted by Jackson et al. (2013) also found that those with more hope and optimism experienced less depressive symptoms during the adjustment process.

Besides, unlike previous research, which emphasized the crucial role of local students or people, international students may feel particularly comfortable or relax in a new environment when they feel more welcomed and included by the locals (Hirai et al., 2015). In this study,

although some students admitted that social networks were essential in facilitating their positive psychological adjustment, some of them also agreed that whether welcomed by the local community wouldn't affect their mood and psychological wellbeing to a great extent. They could receive social support from the students from their home country or the friends in their home country. Moreover, a finding from both the questionnaire survey and interviews suggested that the university mental health team's counseling service was used least often by the international students. This finding revealed two points; firstly, if most students did not know the counseling services, it should strengthen publicity and meet students' needs. Secondly, if they knew the services, most international students didn't suffer severe mental health difficulties.

### **8.5. Social contact and friendship networks**

Moving into a new cultural environment can be both challenging and exciting (Geeraert et al., 2014). Therefore, social contact was deemed an essential coping strategy in international students' intercultural adjustment and adaptation. The three distinct social networks (co-nationals, host-nationals, and other international students) worked as different functions (Wang, 2018). However, not all three networks played a significant role in their academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment. The students addressed the importance of friendship and contact with co-nationals in all three domains of adjustment and frequently mentioned the lacking contact with host nationals during the interviews.

Regarding academic support, interacting with teachers and other international students was also important, especially teachers' professional feedbacks and suggestions, although these two kinds of social networks provided few emotional supports. Compared with the host students, international students seemed more comfortable asking for help from other international students. This section aimed at evaluating friendship and social contact between international students and co-nationals, other international students, and host nationals, inside and outside of the university.

#### **8.5.1. Social contact and friendship with co-nationals**

The findings in this study illustrated that the students or people from the same country played a significant, crucial, and supportive role in students' academic and sociocultural life, especially when they just arrived in the UK or when they needed help. Students felt more comfortable sharing feelings and talking about difficulties they encountered with those from their home country using their mother language. This result was in line with previous research carried out by Sinanan and Gomes (2020) that having similarities in cultural backgrounds and

interests became primary motivators for forming friendships overseas. These co-national friends could positively reduce uncertainty and gave them a sense of belonging where they recreated a 'home away from home.' This phenomenon usually happened among those from great cultural distance countries, with special diets and lifestyles, such as the using of chopsticks and wok that were very different from those in the UK, especially those from Asian countries (Sinanan and Gomes, 2020). In this study, Chinese students were the most representative ones. They cooked Chinese meals, spoke Chinese, and made Chinese friends; such routines facilitated familiarity and made them feel comfortable. Over time, they didn't want to leave their safe zone and enjoyed such lifestyles. It might be because cultural similarity makes communication behavior explanation easier and paves the way for deeper involvement (Searle and Ward, 1990, Gareis, 2012).

However, interactions with co-nationals caused problems such as decreasing opportunities to contact the locals or other international students and hindering their sociocultural adjustment process. According to the findings, several students deemed it a kind of escape from their low English language ability and excuses for not socializing. They said that they didn't worry about adjusting the life or making friends with the locals. They could avoid these difficulties by communicating with those from the same country. This finding was similar to a research conducted by Peacock and Harrison (2009) that most of international students were seen as culturally distant or self-excluding, especially those from Asian countries (Gareis, 2012). Those Confucian Asian students developed strong co-national relationships, while other international students and host-nationals were placed around the Confucian Asian network (Rienties et al., 2013). Besides, not seizing opportunities to contact the students from other countries increased the English deficiency, especially in their spoken English. Although more than half of the participants deemed the improvement of English language ability as an advantage to study abroad (see section 4.7.1.), most of them related this kind of progress to their writing or reading and still thought their spoken English or communication with others were lacking. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the English language abilities for reading and writing were acquired through daily practice. As compulsory academic procedures, they had to read various materials and prepare many assignments unconditionally. However, due to less contact with home students and lack of opportunity to practice, their spoken English didn't significantly progress. The previous study also found this effect and reported that due to the less contact with the co-nationals, these international students lacked valuable information to increase their communication and interaction in the host educational setting (Geeraert et al., 2014).

### **8.5.2. Social contact and friendship with other international students**

Multi-national contact and friendship were built easily with those who shared a similar culture or experience and were open to learning from other cultures (Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Based on the quantitative research findings, other international students also contributed to international students' academic adjustment. It was in line with previous studies' results, which emphasized the crucial position of other international students during the adjustment process (Neri and Ville, 2008, Sinanan and Gomes, 2020, Gareis, 2012, Schartner, 2015).

However, the interview data illustrated that although other international students were deemed as a priority when they sought academic help, sometimes it may not be possible for them to do so. This point was mentioned mainly by those from China. They said that most of their classmates were from China, and there were only a few other international students in their programs. Therefore, owing to the uneven distribution of other international students in the program, they didn't have many chances to contact the other international students. The significance of other international students was neglected under such circumstances.

However, students from other Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Thailand, or Japan, held an opposite opinion; they spoke highly of the help from other international students, especially those from similar cultures, and felt less pressure and more confidence while communicating with them. Although they had to speak English with other international students, they felt comfortable and relaxed compared with the locals. They didn't need to worry about their accent and believed that a similar study abroad experience could help them understand each other. Besides, being consistent with previous research (Hendrickson et al., 2011), the finding also indicated that international students with relatively few co-nationals might be 'forced' to be social and become more open to interacting with others. They were more likely to engage with other international students who shared a similar culture.

### **8.5.3. Social contact and friendship with host nationals**

Previous literature suggested that having more relations or interactions with host students was positively related to international students' satisfaction and connectivity (Hendrickson et al., 2011). In the current study, many international students acknowledged the importance of contact with host-nationals, some expressed a strong desire or motivation to interact with the host students. However, only a few students mentioned the deep or extensive level of relations with them. A similar finding was reported in a study by Schartner (2015), where postgraduate international students in the UK reported difficulties maintaining meaningful and frequent contact with British students.

Findings in this research showed the effects of using social media on social networks. For instance, some Chinese students were still active users of the Chinese platform WeChat, which allowed them to keep in touch with families and friends at home. This kind of country-specific social media platform was essential and played a crucial role in maintaining a feeling of connectedness with their national or cultural identities (Sinanan and Gomes, 2020).

However, this resulted in a dilemma; on the one hand, such a convenience narrowed the distance between students and their families, but at the same time hinder interaction with host nationals. The result also revealed that one reason for the lack of contact with host students was frequent contact with the co-nationals and social media use. By doing this, the needs for seeking emotional support were met, they could stay in their safe zones all the time and didn't feel alone. The finding suggested that the host nationals they contact most frequently were their British teachers or other staff in Student Service Centre, and they were extremely complimentary about their patience and help.

Besides, similar to previous research conducted by Geeraert et al. (2014), this longitudinal study also found that at the beginning of their program, the close interaction with students from their home country and the lack of contact with host-nationals didn't have large effects on their adjustment. However, as time went by, those who failed to make friends or interact with host-nationals experienced some invisible difficulties, such as improving their spoken English (see section 8.2.3). The finding indicated an increased degree of segregation between the international students and host students at the end of their taught period. A possible explanation for this was that international students found it challenging to create and maintain sustainable contacts or friendships with host nationals, as suggested by Geeraert et al. (2014).

## **8.6. Other issues regarding students' adjustment**

### **8.6.1. The role of the host university**

In general, living and studying in the host university seemed to be a pleasant experience for most international students. Some of them focused on their academic study and neglected the sociocultural experience to a degree, whereas some other students expected to have more interaction with the host community. These findings supported studies that suggested that interaction with local students was limited to academic settings or shared accommodation (Wu and Hammond, 2011), and some of them felt maintaining meaningful interaction with British people was difficult and frustrating (Schartner, 2015). Therefore, the above findings indicated that despite those who neglect the sociocultural experience and had various concerns, some international students still have expectations for further involvement and have more sociocultural experiences.

Besides, supportive academic resources and students' services were praised by most of the participants. They also mentioned the high frequency of using them to improve their academic abilities and solve daily life problems. In general, the students spoke highly of the staff and faculty and said they were very patient and helpful when they asked any questions.

Additionally, various academic resources or services, such as in-session English courses, library support services, research seminars, played a significant role in improving their academic skills to have a better academic adjustment. Different societies and university life support services, including welcome week, student advice, accommodation, and reception services, also helped with international students' sociocultural adjustment.

According to the results, there was still progress for the university to be made in supporting international students. For example, previous research conducted in Britain suggested that international students generally reported negative attitudes towards psychological help-seeking and felt shamed about mental well-being and psychological help-seeking (Soorkia et al., 2011). Similarly, only one student mentioned using the counseling service. It was unknown whether the other students felt reluctant to use it or didn't meet any psychological problems.

### **8.6.2. Demographic characteristics**

It is significant to consider demographic characteristics while discussing international students' adjustment as previous literature suggested that some demographic characteristics would associate with the academic (Aderi et al., 2013, Thiele et al., 2017), sociocultural (Poyrazli and Kavanaugh, 2006) and psychological adjustments (Soorkia et al., 2011). Similarly, this study also found that international students with specific background characteristics performed differently during the adjustment process.

Regarding students' demographic characteristics, the findings revealed that those whose first language were not English had relatively difficult adjustment process, especially in academic domains. It was generally consistent with the literature supported by researches which suggested that English proficiency plays a crucial role for international students in pursuing overseas education, especially for those whose first language is not English (Martirosyan et al., 2015, Wilson et al., 2019). Additionally, the results also indicated that the students from English speaking countries, such as America or Canada had better academic performance and encountered fewer academic difficulties compared with those from other countries, they spent less time in preparing class materials and writing assignments. Instead, they had plenty of time in travelling, making friends and enjoying their lives in the UK, thus leading to a better sociocultural adjustment.

Additionally, in terms of country of origin, the findings in this study found that Chinese students were more likely to interact with other Chinese, which might have an invisible influence on their sociocultural and academic adjustment even if they didn't realize it. It might be the fact that Chinese students couldn't avoid being involved with other Chinese as they were the largest population among the international students in some universities. Several previous literature or discussions pay more attention to Chinese international students while discussing demographic characteristics as they comprised the largest international student group studying overseas (Wang, 2018). Wang et al. (2012) reported that Chinese international students encountered more difficulties in their adjustment process compared with those from Europe or other Western countries. In addition, they have faced unique acculturative stress due to the difference in the education system and social rules between Chinese and the host culture, such as fitting into local life or expressing their opinions in class (Wang, 2010). However, Yan and Berliner (2011) discovered that Chinese students' social and emotional needs were met via involvement with other Chinese. The findings in current research found that one of the main reasons they were more likely to interact with Chinese students was the large Chinese population in their program. They admitted that be together and speaking Chinese could make them feel safe, secure, and a sense of belongings, even if it may affect their sociocultural adjustment and improvement in English language ability. Although frequent interaction with people from the same country seemed comfortable and convenient, international students might lose the valuable chance to experience local cultures and try something different, as it could only be obtained through overseas study.

### **8.7. The U-curve hypothesis**

The U-curve hypothesis is usually introduced to describe the changing process of the adjustment of international students, starting with a good and optimistic feeling initially, followed by feelings of refusal, and then experienced recovery or balance in the end. The U-curve hypothesis and its limitations were reviewed in Chapter 2 (see section 2.2.1.). In this research, the findings from both the visual graph evaluation and numerical evidence collected from the questionnaire surveys indicated that the U-curve hypothesis's model was not applicable to describe the experience of most of the international students. The data suggested that students' adjustment process was a complicated process affected by various factors which a specific curve could not describe. These factors could be categorized as internal factors and external factors. The internal ones are related to language ability, good interpersonal relationships, and the proportion of academic study in their daily life. Whereas the external factors were relevant to cultural distance, the supportive teachers or other

university staffs, the satisfaction and length of the chosen program, and the relations between their home country and the UK.

In the current study, for most of the international students, the adjustment patterns in four evaluated contexts (academic, sociocultural, psychological, and overall) were different (see section 7.4.). For those who deemed their academic performance a priority, their overall adjustment pattern seemed to be similar to the pattern of academic adjustment, whereas the pattern of sociocultural adjustment was inversely to both of these patterns. It might be due to the fact that the academic adjustment usually influenced the level of their overall adjustment, and if they spent more time on their academic studies, they have no time to do other daily activities. Overall, the typical patterns agreed by most of the participants to describe their academic (see section 7.4.1) and overall adjustment (see section 7.4.4.) were graph (a), (c), and (e), with a general upward trend, although some difficulties and fluctuations may occur during the process. In comparison, most participants regarding the sociocultural adjustment (see section 7.4.2) selected graphs (b) and (d).

Additionally, 3% of the international students chose graph (i) and thought their sociocultural adjustment would stay the same without any change. This situation occurred among those who neglected the importance of sociocultural adjustment and then gave it up during the whole adjustment process. Moreover, although they might feel disappointed with the lack of contact with British students, most of them didn't feel a deep sense of anxiety or maintain a high level of excitement followed by a subsequent depression, as presented by the U-curve hypothesis. Therefore, the above findings generally indicated the inadequate model of the U-curve hypothesis in the current study.

As the findings indicated that the U-curve hypothesis was not applicable to describe the MA Degree postgraduate international students at the host university, it is crucial to interpret and summarize the data based on the real empirical evidence. According to the results, participants' adjustment experiences were varied individually regarding their different cultural backgrounds, expectations, and previous experiences. For example, in terms of the issues related to cultural distance, it showed that it was easier for European students to adapt to the British sociocultural environment than the Asian students due to the greater cultural distance. Besides, those who had previous overseas studying or working experience usually had a better academic or sociocultural experience. However, another interesting finding was that those with previous overseas experiences or those from low cultural distance countries were more likely to lose interest in their sociocultural adjustment and thus spent more time on their academic studies. Some of them admitted that high familiarity in culture and environment made them lost the feeling of freshness and have less passion or motivation to discover



something new. For them, studying in the UK was not a brand-new experience. Instead, just like returning to a place that they were familiar with. Therefore, without excitement and curiosity in the initial so-called 'honeymoon' stage, their experience could not be presented by the U-curve hypothesis either.

As the U-curve model was first proposed by Lysgaard (1955), it was based on a specific research context at that time. However, with continuous social progress and fast development in various aspects, the model discovered by Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) a half-century ago was not suitable to describe the adjustment process in the current context. The changing of the global environment, internationalization of higher education, and the dramatically changed way of distributing information, pursuing overseas education, and adjusting to the new environment also mean something different from the previous one.

### **8.8. Summary**

According to the above discussion related to international students' motivations to study abroad, their academic, sociocultural, psychological adjustment, and related issues showed that international students' adjustment was a complicated process that could not be easily described or categorized. The push-pull model described international students' motivation for pursuing overseas study properly for discussions regarding motivations and expectations. In general, students had more academic expectations than sociocultural ones, which was consistent with the motivations' findings.

As the primary purpose of studying abroad, the academic adjustment was suggested to play a significant role compared with sociocultural adjustment. As students themselves, they also focused more on their academic difficulties than issues in the other two domains (sociocultural and psychological). The stress and coping frameworks were introduced. The four critical points associated with their academic adjustment were discussed, including self-regulation skills, English language ability, critical thinking ability, and satisfaction and length of the chosen program. Regarding discussions of sociocultural adjustment over time, the factors that contribute to further understanding the adjustment process, such as personal agency, cultural distance, and cultural identity, were identified. The discussion relevant to social contact and friendship networks and other issues regarding adjustment, including the role of the host university and demographic characteristics, have been found to affect students' adjustment. By discussing the associations between demographic characteristics and different adjustment domains, this study explores the potential influence of individual experience on their overseas study experiences.

Moreover, the model of the U-curve hypothesis was not supported by the research findings. Issues related to different factors, expectations, personal attitudes, and the continually changing and developing world contributed to the U-curve hypothesis's improper applicability. However, it still offered valuable points of view for the current study and provided a comprehensive understanding of the adjustment process. In general, this research suggested several significant issues regarding international students' motivations for overseas research, their expectations, adjustment, and other influential factors. Therefore, based on the findings and previous discussions, the implications and recommendations will be presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 9. Conclusion

This final chapter provides a summary of the study (9.1), its main findings (9.2), contributions (9.3), limitations and recommendations (section 9.4), and a concluding remark (9.5).

### 9.1. Summary of the study

This research focused on the adaptation and adjustment process of a group of MA Degree international students in the humanities and social sciences at a British university, exploring three domains of students' adjustment, including academic, sociocultural, and psychological. A longitudinal mixed methods research design was used, the data was collected via semi-structured interviews (N=16) and questionnaire surveys (N=120,108,102) in three stages across nine months. The stress and coping frameworks and the U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955) were adopted as theoretical frameworks.

In order to provide detailed information, research questions were divided into six categories:

#### Motivations and expectations:

- What are international students' motivations and expectations for studying abroad?
- Do students' studying and living experience meet their initial expectations?

#### Academic experiences

- How do international students perceive their academic adjustment experience over time?
- What are the students' difficulties or challenges in academic domain and what coping strategies do they employ?

#### Sociocultural experiences

- How do international students perceive their sociocultural adjustment experience over time?
- What are the students' difficulties or challenges in sociocultural domain and what coping strategies do they employ?
- Are these students able to participate or get involved in the current university's sociocultural life?

#### Psychological experiences

- How do international students perceive their psychological adjustment experience over time?
- What are the students' difficulties or challenges in psychological domain and what coping strategies do they employ?

#### The U-curve hypothesis

- Is the model of the U-curve hypothesis applicable to international students' academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment?

## **9.2. Main research findings**

This section revisiting the research questionnaires and summarizes the research findings regarding the motivations and adjustment process in the three domains.

### **9.2.1. Motivations for overseas study**

Research questions regarding international students' motivations for pursuing overseas study, the findings suggested that most of the students' motivations remained the same before and after studying in the UK. The value of the overseas study, personal or family-related reasons, financial issues were deemed the primary motivations for international students to study abroad. Among them, factors related to the importance of overseas education and financial considerations were consistent before and after involving in the host environment. At the same time, their personal or family-related reasons changed after studying at a British university. In this study, the push-pull model was the most appropriate for investigating motivations for pursuing overseas education and it was easier and more convenient to explain the findings while considering both 'push' and 'pull' factors. In the first interview round (at the beginning of their program), international students' motivations to study abroad and in the UK were quite different, although they were affected by the aim to study in a high-quality university and the influence from family and friends. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative data were generally consistent with the previous literature, presented in the literature review chapter (section 2.1.4), containing personal, educational, cultural, informational, and environmental factors. Additionally, research questions related to international students' expectations, was found that while talking about the initial expectations for pursuing overseas education, most of the students related it to the academic experiences, regarding their personal achievement in the academic context and their expectations for others. Interestingly, international students' academic expectations remained the same after their arrival whereas other expectations might be changed or reshaped as a result of unexpected or new challenges. Moreover, unlike findings from other research that political or social factors, such as national policies or, political and social situations, often play a role in pushing international students to study abroad (Chen, 2007, Maringe and Carter, 2007). In this study, students from both questionnaire surveys and qualitative interviews showed highly disagreement while talking about the issues such as avoiding unacceptable political and social conditions, as well as avoiding ethnic and social conflicts, indicating that

neither of these issues formed a strong factor in affecting students' motivations to study abroad.

Findings regarding motivations to pursue overseas study and the UK add valuable information for future higher education student recruitment. For instance, the university could offer attractive inducement, such as opportunities to engage with the local community or getting involved with other international students. Moreover, by comparing findings in qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaire surveys within the same population, it provides a comprehensive view of international students' motivations and expectations.

### **9.2.2. Academic adjustment**

As an essential part of overseas education, the academic adjustment was inevitable and usually had large influences compared with sociocultural and psychological adjustment. In relation to the research questions for academic adjustment experience, it was found that international students' academic adjustment and achievements improved over time, although they suffered some challenges and met various difficulties during the adjustment process. Regarding the research question related to international students' academic difficulties and coping strategies, the results found that the frequent mentioned academic difficulties were critical thinking ability, academic writing, plagiarism, independent study, and class discussion, which might be caused by perceived cultural dissimilarities or learning differences. Difficulties in academic writing and plagiarism reduced dramatically throughout the nine months, whereas the issues relevant to critical thinking ability were lacking improvement. Students coped with these difficulties by taking steps such as making better preparation or seeking academic support from teachers and students from their home country related to a problem-focused coping strategy (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). This study found that the self-regulation skills, English language ability, satisfaction, and length of the chosen program also affected students' academic adjustment. Among them, language issues were the common difficulties for those from non-English speaking countries. The students' English ability in reading and writing improved during the nine-months, whereas their spoken English hadn't progressed much due to lacking practice. Support from domestic peers, teachers, and university resources were beneficial and significant for solving academic problems. Most of the students spoke highly of the university and their chosen program and admitted that they would still choose the same one if they have another chance.

### **9.2.3. Sociocultural adjustment**

With regards to the third focus associated with international students' sociocultural adjustment, most of the interviewees had positive first impressions, expectations at the early

stage (beginning of their program), however, their satisfactions of sociocultural adjustment decreased under increasing academic pressure. Personal agency (section 6.1.1), cultural identity (section 6.1.1), and cultural distance (section 6.1.2 and 6.1.3) were crucial to the formation of sociocultural adjustment. Compared with their academic adjustment, international students were less willing to change and maintain their previous habits during the sociocultural adjustment process. Some students deemed themselves as temporary residents and had strongly desire to maintain their own habits or original cultural heritage instead of merging into the host country completely. Interestingly, this finding conflicted with their original motivations to pursue overseas study, which deemed cultural engagement as an influential factor. Therefore, it was shown that international students' initial motivations might be changed when they arrived at the host country which would in return affect involvement with the locals. Besides, international students' cultural identity was enhanced within such a multicultural environment. While experiencing difficulties, tension, or culture shock because of cultural differences, international students were more likely related it to their culture of origin.

Most of the students in this study experienced a so-called 'international postgraduate culture' suggested by Wu and Hammond (2011), they interacted frequently with students from their home country, preferred home lifestyles even if they had opportunities to interact with the host students at accommodations or in different activities. Although interact with students from various countries and experience different cultures was one of the original expectations before coming to the UK (see section 4.4.2), there was still a gap between the expectation and the reality due to the difficulties they met and the decision they made as a result of cultural distance. Most of the participants admitted that they were inclined to interact or ask for help from the students in their home country. Therefore, their interaction with the local people, engagement with the British culture, and involvement with the local environment need improvement. Although most students held positive attitudes towards the British society or culture, they still maintain their values, beliefs, and lifestyles. Some of them deemed it a temporary adjustment in terms of their sociocultural experiences. This preference indicated that either cultural identity or value system was shaped over a long period and seemed difficult to change within such a short period. International students did experience something new, actually, but they still prefer to remain who they are. Besides, most of the students held positive attitudes in making friends or involved in the social activities at their early adjustment stage. However, as time went by when the academic study was tense, several students gave up their sociocultural activities and focused on their studies. Some of the students said they didn't worry about adjusting the life or making friends with the locals.

They could avoid these difficulties by communicating with the students from their home country.

Moreover, the university's Student Service and Accommodation Service's positive impacts indicate that better support services from the beginning of their university life would help them with better sociocultural and institutional adjustments.

#### **9.2.4. Psychological adjustment**

While considering psychological adjustment, international students were generally optimistic and satisfied with their psychological wellbeing and lives in the UK. Students reported a feeling of homesickness and loneliness in the early stages (at the time they arrived at the UK), however, such feelings vanished when they met other students from their home country.

International students' psychological adjustment was largely influenced by academic performance and it was adjusted according to the academic progress. For those who have few academic difficulties tend to more satisfied with their psychological adjustment. Students experienced more stress and anxiety when their assignment's deadline was approaching, however, the level of stress reduced after their submission. Besides, it was found that many international students, especially those from non-English speaking countries, found English language ability a very important obstacle during the class, especially in discussion, presentations and understanding what the teacher talking about. Under such circumstances, they felt stress and annoyed. However, students adopted various coping strategies to reduce their stress and adjust their mood, such as supports from their family and friends, attending activities, or doing exercises. Those who possess positive attitudes achieved better results in their psychological adjustment. Interestingly, in this study, international students seldom use the counseling services provided by the university, due to the fact that they didn't know or familiar with the service or they didn't suffer serious psychological problems during the process.

#### **9.2.5. The U-curve hypothesis**

Regarding the U-curve hypothesis, the findings revealed that the U-curve hypothesis was not appropriate to describe international students' adjustment process neither in academic, sociocultural nor psychological domain. Various responses from the visual graphical evaluation suggested that students' studying abroad experience was rather complicated compared with the pattern in U-curve hypothesis whereas some other students admitted that their adjustment experience was better than the U-curve hypothesis. The factors, such as cultural distance, English language ability and expectations were also mentioned by the students as explanations of lacking supportive evidence for the U-curve hypothesis in this

research. Also, the visual graph which adopted in study showed the validity and complexity of the students' experience.

### **9.3. Contributions**

This study used a mixed-method research design to understand international postgraduate students' motivations for study abroad and their subsequent academic, sociocultural, and psychological experiences. Its contributions are methodological, empirical as well as conceptual.

#### **9.3.1. Methodological contributions**

Unlikely some studies in this field to date adopt a single method approach. For instance, studies carried out by Rabia (2017) and Coles and Swami (2012) adopted qualitative interviews to investigate international students' adjustment in the US and the UK. In contrast, Aldawsari et al. (2018) and Bastien et al. (2018) used questionnaire surveys in their research. However, mixed-methods studies are increasingly common though (Dentakos et al., 2017, Alsaifi and Shin, 2017, Lashari et al., 2018), and a mixed-methods research approach in this study combining qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires helps explain the findings from both macro and micro perspectives. It contributes a more comprehensive understanding of international student experience and adds more fine-grained views (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, Creswell et al., 2003). The data collection process in three-time stages throughout the whole academic year with both questionnaires and interviews enables the collection of empirical data from more diverse time under different conditions (at the beginning of their program, at the beginning of second semester and at the end of taught period).

#### **9.3.2. Empirical contributions**

Unlike other research which mainly focused on international students' adjustment in the United States (Mesidor, 2016), Canada (Thomson and Esses, 2016), New Zealand (Beaver and Tuck, 1999), or Australia (Chen and Zimitat, 2006), this research conducted in the UK, at a British university, following a growing trend in the UK context research (Young et al., 2013, Schartner and Young, 2016, Yu and Moskal, 2019). Besides, international students contributing heavily to the UK, especially the population of postgraduate students. However, it is surprising that most research exploring international students' experiences is somewhat limited to undergraduates (Bastien et al., 2018, Rabia, 2017) or mixed groups of international students (Cowley and Hyams–Ssekasi, 2018, Chien, 2016). In contrast, this research only involved full-time, postgraduate international students in the one-year master program from



humanities and social sciences, primarily because most international students have majored in social studies, business, languages, and art designs (UKCISA, 2017). As attending a one-year master's program, these students have to experience the whole adjustment process only in one year, it is a tight schedule, and a burdensome task.

### **9.3.3. Conceptual contributions**

This study contributes conceptually to research on international students' adjustment experience in various aspects.

Firstly, it fills several research gaps in students' adjustment research. Previous research tended to focus on the international students' motivations for study abroad and their sociocultural and psychological adjustment separately (Jackson et al., 2013, Bastien et al., 2018). In contrast, this study aims to consider their motivations and adjustment experience at the same time.

Secondly, in order to investigate international students' adjustment trajectories, a visual graph was adopted. By using the visual expression, international students could describe their adjustment process accurately to avoid any verbal expression ambiguity. Besides, as a complex process, international students' adjustment in each domain (academic, sociocultural and psychological) could not be described in a single or common graph, therefore, a graph which combined with various curves, could help to explain the adjustment experience better. Thirdly, previous research (Chien, 2016) introduced the U-curve hypothesis to explain the international students' academic and sociocultural adjustment but neglected their psychological experiences. By comparison, the current study updating, re-examining and extend (Lysgaard, 1955) the U-curve hypothesis's applicability for three domains based on the current research context to identify variations across academic, sociocultural, and psychological adjustment. Therefore, this research makes significant contributions to theoretical knowledge of the international student experience and retest the applicability of the U-curve hypothesis and relevant theories in different regions and populations

### **9.4. Limitations and Recommendations**

Although this research generated some interesting findings, it had several limitations which need to be recognized for the future research. Firstly, this study was conducted at a specific department in a British university, with a relatively large Chinese international student population. The large number of international students, especially from China, could be one of the reasons why many of them complained about being surrounded by co-nationals and lacking opportunities to interact with the locals and access to the British cultures. The generalization of international students in this study was limited as they didn't from many

geographic regions. Therefore, international students from other countries and other disciplines may have different adjustment experiences, which might follow different adjustment process, the future research could examine more diverse populations from various countries and backgrounds, who pursuing Masters' degree in other universities and focusing on other programmes in the UK.

Secondly, the number of questionnaire responses was relatively small, and the result cannot be generalized to represent all international students. The students were asked to describe their experience of adjustment over a period of nine month, which was from the beginning of their program till the end of their teaching period, it is possible that they might overgeneralized of their adjustment process. Besides, it couldn't be ensured that their adjustment experience would remain the same during the dissertation period. Therefore, further longitudinal research, involving more stages of data collection, such as the time before students' arrival in the host country, their dissertation period, as well as the time before leaving the UK, is needed to obtain more specific information, so as to trace their adjustment experience in a more comprehensive way.

Thirdly, as the study was taken place in 2018, changes have occurred in the UK higher education, for instance, the rising tuition fees of the university, higher living fees, the influence of Covid-19, different visa policy (such as two-years Post-Study Work visa), could affect the learning and living experiences of the international students. Further research could undertake in-depth investigation on international students' adjustment under the current context.

Fourthly, future research could include data from lecturers, personal tutors, or other university staff on measuring students' adjustment, as seen from other perspectives would provide a comprehensive panorama on the adjustment experience of international students. Future studies could explore or make comparisons between students' own perceptions and the comments from the teachers.

Finally, the results of this study also indicate the need of a further study for re-entry adjustment to their home country and previous life, and the influences of the changes they've made after a one-year study in the UK.

## **9.5. Implications**

Findings from the three different domains (academic, sociocultural and psychological) of adjustment have several important implications that are applicable to learning and administration, which are presented as follows:

### **9.5.1. Implications for student services**

In this study, although the counselling service from the university mental health was used least often by the international students, there were still several students reported to have mild to medium degree stress or anxiety. It was possible that some of them might not be involved with adequate mental health services due to lacking information about available options. Therefore, it is crucial that the university could identify international students' potential difficulties and it is also necessary to popularize the counselling service and encourage more international students to use it with an open attitude. The function of the relevant sociocultural support should be stressed and improved by the host university. The obtained results imply that international students' psychological wellbeing could be maintained through training consultant on how to measure psychological adjustment and how to deal with students' needs. The findings highlight the significance of psychological adjustment for university students' academic achievement, and it is crucial for the university to recognize the importance of international students' psychological adjustment and take action to resolve their issues so that the challenges would not negatively impact their lives or academic performance. Culturally appropriate services, for instance, providing service in a students' native language if possible and through informal networks, which might make the international students feel more comfortable and relax under a counseling condition.

In addition, findings from international students' motivations and expectations also provide beneficial information for future recruitment of international students regarding student services, for instance, offer attractive incentives (scholarships), or support service (opportunities to involved with local communities) to reach different students' requirements. Moreover, the university could assist the students to have better adjustment experience through encouraging them to use the available university resources, such as the resource finding services from the library or the support service in academic writing.

### **9.5.2. Implications for future policy**

The findings revealed that pursuing overseas education had more advantages than disadvantages, which benefited to the international students together with the host country. Among them, the length of the chosen program was reported to be an advantage which motivated international students to study in the UK, as it was timesaving and relatively cheaper. However, after nine-months study, several students admitted that one year to complete a master's degree was challenging, and they hoped to have more time for robust learning. As a result, educators and policymakers face challenges in addressing the downside of the one-year program and leveraging these positive characteristics to attract more

international students to study in the UK. Therefore, as financial consideration played an essential role in making decision to study abroad, special policies relating to scholarships or financial supports for the one- year program international students who studying in the UK could be improved so as to attract those excellent students with financial difficulties. Additionally, the host university could pay more attention on reducing international students' adjustment stress and form social ties on campus via various outreach, such as connection with other international students in the UK, encouraging the students to join campus activities or providing placement in host families. University administrators and student support services should be aware of the significant role of the social support and making plans according to their unique situation to make sure all the international students have opportunities to form social networks during their study in the UK.

#### **9.6. Concluding remarks**

This research investigated the motivations and adjustment process of postgraduate international students in the humanities and social sciences at a British university. Although students encountered various difficulties and challenges throughout the nine-months of study, they still made progress in academic study and personal growth. English language ability was the main issue affecting international students' transitional experience whereas support from family and friends from their home country was the common factor which could facilitate their successful adjustment in three domains (academic, sociocultural and psychological). Staff and university's support service also assisted the students with their academic and sociocultural adjustment.

It is hoped that the findings may help staff in host educational setting and international office, and counselors in university counseling center to have a better understanding of the needs of international students and have a good preparation to help them succeed in a new educational and cultural environment. I also hope this doctoral thesis has made a small contribution in understanding international students' adjustment experience and provide useful information for the improvement of higher education quality in the UK.

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## Appendix A: First stage survey

### Project information

This research seeks to investigate the reasons why international students study abroad and their academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment experiences in a British university. This questionnaire includes questions related to yourself, your motivations to pursue overseas study and your initial expectations. There are --- 110 short questions, and the survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Before you start, please read and sign the following consent form.

### Consent Form

I have been given some general information about this project and the types of questions I can expect to answer.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary and that I am free to decline to participate, without consequence, at any time prior to or at any point during the activity.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential, and the student identity number I provide will be used only for the purposes of this research.

I understand that the results of this activity will be used exclusively in the below-named student's PhD thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations in academic conferences.

I also understand that there are no risks involved in participating in this activity, beyond those risks experienced in everyday life.

I have read the information above. By signing below and returning this form, I am consenting to participate in this survey/questionnaire project as designed by the below named student.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher Contact: [x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk)

Xuan Zhao, PhD candidate

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS)

*Please start the questionnaire on the next page...*

## Part 1. Backgrounds Information

Please provide your personal details here, they will be used for statistical analysis and will not be revealed in any publication.

1. Student identity number:

2. Age:

3. Gender: Female          Male

4. Programme of study:

5. Country of origin:

6. First language:

7. English is your:

## Part 2. Motivations and expectations for study abroad.

Below are some reasons that might have influenced your decision to study abroad. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

I came to study abroad because:							
1	I wanted to avoid the unacceptable political and social conditions in my home country.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I wanted to avoid ethnic and social conflicts in my home country.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am planning to immigrate in the future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I wanted to have more freedom and be independent.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I want to gain international and cross-cultural perspectives	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I want to get a good education or to have a good academic experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I want to increase the level of my English language skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I wanted to expand my career and life opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I want to travel.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I want to have fun and have a good time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I want to get to know people from other countries.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I want to gain other life skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	My family encouraged, supported, or expected me to do so.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	My previous study or travel abroad experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I receive the funding from the government or the current university.						
16	My job requires me to upgrade my educational qualifications or professional knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	The influences from my friends with study abroad experience.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	It is a popular trend in the globalized era.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Below are some reasons that might have influenced your decision to the UK. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

I came to study in the UK because of							
1	Britain's rich history.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	A shorter geographical distance between my home country and Britain.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	A cultural environment that is more similar to my country.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Special historical or political relations with my home country.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Reputation of the British university.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Worldwide recognized educational degree.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	More choice of the programmes.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	A more flexible application schedule, process or procedure.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Shorter period for study or degree completion.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Lower tuition fees than other destinations.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Influence from others.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Have relatives in the UK.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	My plan to stay or work in the UK after graduation.	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 3. Academic experiences.

Below are questions related to your academic experience so far.

Please indicate the level of agreement or disagreement based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am enjoying the lifestyle of being a university student	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am satisfied with my academic abilities/skills of being a student	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am satisfied with the academic resources at the university	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I think I am underestimating the difficulties I might face with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I am confident of my English ability for my academic work	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I like the teaching styles or the way teachers in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I sometimes feel as though my education is not worth time away from my work or my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I believe everything will become better as time goes by.	1	2	3	4	5	6



#### Part 4. Academic difficulties

Below are aspects of academic study that international students may struggle with. Please indicate whether you have had any difficulties in these areas.

Please tick any that apply

1	Academic writing	
2	Knowledge related to plagiarism and its relevant practice.	
3	Critical thinking ability	
4	Time management for my studies	
5	Doing independent studies	
6	The UK learning style	
7	Understanding subject knowledge in my field.	
8	Understanding what the lecturers said in the class or seminar	
9	Understanding the accent of the teachers or tutors	

#### Part 5. Sociocultural experiences.

Below are questions related to your sociocultural experiences.

Please indicate your level of satisfaction based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely unsatisfied 2- Mostly unsatisfied 3- Slightly unsatisfied 4- Slightly satisfied 5- Mostly satisfied  
6- Completely satisfied)

1	Making British friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Making friends from my home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Making friends with other international students	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Using the transport system	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Getting used to the pace of life	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Going shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Going to social events/gatherings/functions	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Worshipping in your usual way	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Going into pubs or bars	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Talking about yourself with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Understanding jokes and humour	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	Dealing with someone who is unpleasant/cross/aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	Following rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	Dealing with people in authority	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5	6

18	Adapting to local accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	6
19	Finding your way around	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	Dealing with the climate	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	Going to coffee shops/food stores/restaurants/fast food outlets	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	Understanding the local accent/language	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	Living away from family members overseas	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	Understanding the local value system	1	2	3	4	5	6
25	Understanding cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5	6
26	Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue	1	2	3	4	5	6
27	Seeing things from a British person's point of view	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 6. Psychological wellbeing.

Below are questions related to your psychological wellbeing since you began your programme of study.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I have been missing my friends in my home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I have been missing my home	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I have been missing my parents and other family members	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am worried about love or intimate relationships with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I have worried about the way I look	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I have worried about the impression I make on others	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I have worried about being at university in general	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I have liked my classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I have liked my roommates	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I have liked being away from my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I have liked my social life	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I have liked the university in general	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I have felt angry	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I have felt lonely	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I have felt anxious or nervous	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	I have felt depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I have felt optimistic about my future at the university	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I have felt good about myself	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Part 7. Satisfaction with life

Please indicate your level of satisfaction based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely inapplicable 2- Mostly inapplicable 3- Slightly inapplicable 4- Slightly applicable 5- Mostly applicable  
6- Completely applicable)

1	My life is close to my ideal in most aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	The condition of life is excellent	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	So far, I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	So far, I got the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	If I could back to the past, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Part 8. Overall adjustment

Below are questions related to your overall adjustment in this stage. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I am satisfied with my overall adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am satisfied with my academic adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am satisfied with my sociocultural adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am satisfied with my psychological adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6

*Are there any other comments you would like to add about yourself and your early experiences of studying in the UK?*

*Please feel free to write as much as you like below:*

*• If you are interested in taking part in an interview about your experiences, please leave your email address below:*

---

Thank you very much for helping me with my research project!

Xuan Zhao

## Appendix B: Second stage survey

### Project information

This research seeks to investigate the reasons why international students study abroad and their academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment experiences in a British university. This questionnaire includes questions related to yourself, your motivations to pursue overseas study and your initial expectations. There are --- 79 short questions, and the survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Before you start, please read and sign the following consent form.

### Consent Form

I have been given some general information about this project and the types of questions I can expect to answer.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary and that I am free to decline to participate, without consequence, at any time prior to or at any point during the activity.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential, and the student identity number I provide will be used only for the purposes of this research.

I understand that the results of this activity will be used exclusively in the below-named student's PhD thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations in academic conferences.

I also understand that there are no risks involved in participating in this activity, beyond those risks experienced in everyday life.

I have read the information above. By signing below and returning this form, I am consenting to participate in this survey/questionnaire project as designed by the below named student.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher Contact: [x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk)

Xuan Zhao, PhD candidate

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS)

*Please start the questionnaire on the next page...*

### Part 1. Background information

Please provide your personal details here, they will be used for statistical analysis and will not be revealed in any publication.

1. Student identity number:

2. Age:

3. Gender: Female      Male

4. Programme of study:

5. Country of origin:

6. First language:

7. English is your:

### Part 2. Academic experiences.

Below are questions related to your academic experience so far.

Please indicate the level of agreement or disagreement based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am enjoying the lifestyle of being a university student	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am satisfied with my academic abilities/skills of being a student	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am satisfied with the academic resources at the university	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I think I am underestimating the difficulties I might face with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I am confident of my English ability for my academic work	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I like the teaching styles or the way teachers in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I sometimes feel as though my education is not worth time away from my work or my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I believe everything will become better as time goes by.	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 3. Academic difficulties

Below are aspects of academic study that international students may struggle with. Please indicate whether you have had any difficulties in these areas.

Please tick any that apply

1	Academic writing	
2	Knowledge related to plagiarism and its relevant practice.	

3	Critical thinking ability	
4	Time management for my studies	
5	Doing independent studies	
6	The UK learning style	
7	Understanding subject knowledge in my field.	
8	Understanding what the lecturers said in the class or seminar	
9	Understanding the accent of the teachers or tutors	

#### Part 4. Sociocultural experiences.

Below are questions related to your sociocultural experiences.

Please indicate your level of satisfaction based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely unsatisfied 2- Mostly unsatisfied 3- Slightly unsatisfied 4- Slightly satisfied 5- Mostly satisfied  
6- Completely satisfied)

1	Making British friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Making friends from my home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Making friends with other international students	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Using the transport system	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Getting used to the pace of life	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Going shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Going to social events/gatherings/functions	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Worshipping in your usual way	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Going into pubs or bars	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Talking about yourself with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Understanding jokes and humour	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	Dealing with someone who is unpleasant/cross/aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	Following rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	Dealing with people in authority	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	Adapting to local accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	6
19	Finding your way around	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	Dealing with the climate	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	Going to coffee shops/food stores/restaurants/fast food outlets	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	Understanding the local accent/language	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	Living away from family members overseas	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	Understanding the local value system	1	2	3	4	5	6
25	Understanding cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5	6

26	Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue	1	2	3	4	5	6
27	Seeing things from a British person's point of view	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 5. Psychological wellbeing.

Below are questions related to your psychological wellbeing since you began your programme of study.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I have been missing my friends in my home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I have been missing my home	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I have been missing my parents and other family members	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am worried about love or intimate relationships with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I have worried about the way I look	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I have worried about the impression I make on others	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I have worried about being at university in general	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I have liked my classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I have liked my roommates	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I have liked being away from my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I have liked my social life	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I have liked the university in general	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I have felt angry	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I have felt lonely	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I have felt anxious or nervous	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	I have felt depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I have felt optimistic about my future at the university	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I have felt good about myself	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 6. Satisfaction with life

Please indicate your level of satisfaction based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely inapplicable 2- Mostly inapplicable 3- Slightly inapplicable 4- Slightly applicable 5- Mostly applicable 6- Completely applicable)

1	My life is close to my ideal in most aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	The condition of life is excellent	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	So far, I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	So far, I got the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5	6

5	If I could back to the past, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6
---	--	---	---	---	---	---	---

**Part 7. Overall adjustment**

Below are questions related to your overall adjustment in this stage. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I am satisfied with my overall adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am satisfied with my academic adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am satisfied with my sociocultural adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am satisfied with my psychological adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6

*Are there any other comments you would like to add about yourself and your second stage experiences of studying in the UK?*

*Please feel free to write as much as you like below:*

That is the end of the survey.

Thanks again for helping me with my research project!

Xuan Zhao



## Appendix C: Third stage survey

### Project information

This research seeks to investigate the reasons why international students study abroad and their academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment experiences in a British university. This questionnaire includes questions related to yourself, your motivations to pursue overseas study and your initial expectations. There are --- 123 short questions, and the survey will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Before you start, please read and sign the following consent form.

### Consent Form

I have been given some general information about this project and the types of questions I can expect to answer.

I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary and that I am free to decline to participate, without consequence, at any time prior to or at any point during the activity.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential, and the student identity number I provide will be used only for the purposes of this research.

I understand that the results of this activity will be used exclusively in the below-named student's PhD thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations in academic conferences.

I also understand that there are no risks involved in participating in this activity, beyond those risks experienced in everyday life.

I have read the information above. By signing below and returning this form, I am consenting to participate in this survey/questionnaire project as designed by the below named student.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher Contact: [x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk)

Xuan Zhao, PhD candidate

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS)

*Please start the questionnaire on the next page...*

## Part 1. Background information

Please provide your personal details here, they will be used for statistical analysis and will not be revealed in any publication.

1. Student identity number:

2. Age:

3. Gender: Female      Male

4. Programme of study:

5. Country of origin:

6. First language

7. English is your:

## Part 2. Academic experiences.

Below are questions related to your academic experience so far.

Please indicate the level of agreement or disagreement based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I am satisfied with the level of my academic performance to date.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am enjoying the lifestyle of being a university student	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am satisfied with my academic abilities/skills of being a student	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am satisfied with the academic resources at the university	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I think I am underestimating the difficulties I might face with.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I am confident of my English ability for my academic work	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I like the teaching styles or the way teachers in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I sometimes feel as though my education is not worth time away from my work or my family.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I believe everything will become better as time goes by.	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Part 3. Academic difficulties

Based on your previous academic difficulties, please indicate whether you still have any of the academic difficulties.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement based on your own situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	Now I still have difficulty in academic writing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Now I still have difficulty in knowledge related to plagiarism and its relevant practice.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Now I still have difficulty in critical thinking ability.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Now I still have difficulty in time management for my studies.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Now I still have difficulty in doing independent studies.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	Now I still have difficulty in the UK learning style.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Now I still have difficulty in understanding subject knowledge in my field.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Now I still have difficulty in understanding what the lecturers said in the class or seminar.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Now I still have difficulty in understanding the accent of the teachers or tutors.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	If given the chance back to the start of my studies, I would come with more background knowledge in this field.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	If given the chance back to the start of my studies, I would manage time reasonably.	1	2	3	4	5	6

How often do you do the following things? Please answer the following questions based on your own situation.

Please mark one answer for each item.

(1- Never 2- Very Rarely 3- Rarely 4-Occasionally 5- Frequently 6- Very frequently)

1	I have used the INTO in-session lessons to improve my English language ability.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I have used the academic writing support service to improve my writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I have used the library support service to find resources.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I have used the IT service from university IT Service Desk	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	For my academic problems, I ask for help from my teachers or personal tutors	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	For my academic problems, I ask help for my classmates (other international students) or friends from my home country.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	For my academic problems, I ask help for my British friends or classmates.	1	2	3	4	5	6

#### Part 4. Sociocultural experiences.

Below are questions related to your sociocultural experiences.

Please indicate your level of satisfaction based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely unsatisfied 2- Mostly unsatisfied 3- Slightly unsatisfied 4- Slightly satisfied 5- Mostly satisfied

6- Completely satisfied)

1	Making British friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Making friends from my home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	Making friends with other international students	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	Using the transport system	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5	6

6	Getting used to the pace of life	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	Going shopping	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	Going to social events/gatherings/functions	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	Worshipping in your usual way	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	Going into pubs or bars	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	Talking about yourself with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	Understanding jokes and humour	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	Dealing with someone who is unpleasant/cross/aggressive	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	Getting used to the local food/finding food you enjoy	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	Following rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	Dealing with people in authority	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	Adapting to local accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	6
19	Finding your way around	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	Dealing with the climate	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	Going to coffee shops/food stores/restaurants/fast food outlets	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	Understanding the local accent/language	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	Living away from family members overseas	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	Understanding the local value system	1	2	3	4	5	6
25	Understanding cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5	6
26	Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue	1	2	3	4	5	6
27	Seeing things from a British person's point of view	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 5. Sociocultural activities

How often do you do the following things? Please answer the following questions based on personal situation.

(1-Never 2- Very rarely 3- Rarely 4- Occasionally 5- Frequently 6- Very frequently)

1	I participate in activities with students from my home country.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I participate in activities with other international students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I participate in activities with British students or people.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I participate in activities organized by student's union or societies.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I go to religious services or activities.	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 6. Social contact

With whom do you interact most often? / Most of the time I interact with...

Choose one of the following answers

1	Students or people from my home country	
2	Students or people from different countries but with similar culture to mine	
3	Students from different countries	
4	British students	
5	British people (non-students)	
6	Other _____ (please specify if you choose 'other')	

Who are your friends? / Most of my friends are...

Choose one of the following answers

1	Students or people from my home country	
2	Students or people from different countries but with similar culture to mine	
3	Students from different countries	
4	British students	
5	British people (non-students)	
6	Other _____ (please specify if you choose 'other')	

### Part 7. University support service

How often have you used the following university services or resources? Please answer the following questions based on your personal situation.

Please mark one answer for each item.

(1- Never 2- Very Rarely 3- Rarely 4-Occasionally 5- Frequently 6- Very frequently)

1	I have used the university's welcome week service.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I have used the Student Advice Service from the university.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I have used the counselling service from the university Mental Health Team	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I have used the university Careers Service to prepare for my CV and find part-time job	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I have used the Accommodation and Reception Services from the university	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 8. Advantages related to overseas education

Below are advantages related to receiving an overseas education. Please choose any answers that fit your individual situation.

Check any that apply. You can choose more than one answers.

Overall my current UK study abroad experience benefits my:

1	Academic abilities	
2	English language abilities	
3	Professional abilities	
4	Critical thinking skills	
5	Future employment opportunities	
6	Word/Global view	
7	Independence	
8	International social network (connection/friendship/ relationship with others)	
9	Others: _____ (please specify if you choose 'other')	

### Part 9. Psychological wellbeing.

Below are questions related to your psychological wellbeing since you began your programme of study.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

1	I have been missing my friends in my home country	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I have been missing my home	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I have been missing my parents and other family members	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am worried about love or intimate relationships with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I have worried about the way I look	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	I have worried about the impression I make on others	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I have worried about being at university in general	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	I have liked my classes	1	2	3	4	5	6
9	I have liked my roommates	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I have liked being away from my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	I have liked my social life	1	2	3	4	5	6
12	I have liked the university in general	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I have felt angry	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I have felt lonely	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I have felt anxious or nervous	1	2	3	4	5	6
16	I have felt depressed	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	I have felt optimistic about my future at the university	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I have felt good about myself	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 10. Satisfaction with life

Please indicate your level of satisfaction based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely inapplicable 2- Mostly inapplicable 3- Slightly inapplicable 4- Slightly applicable 5- Mostly applicable  
6- Completely applicable)

1	My life is close to my ideal in most aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	The condition of life is excellent	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	So far, I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	So far, I got the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	If I could back to the past, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 11. Overall adjustment

Below are questions related to your overall adjustment in this stage. Please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are based on your own current situation.

(1-Completely Disagree 2- Mostly Disagree 3- Slightly Disagree 4- Slightly Agree 5- Mostly Agree 6- Completely Agree)

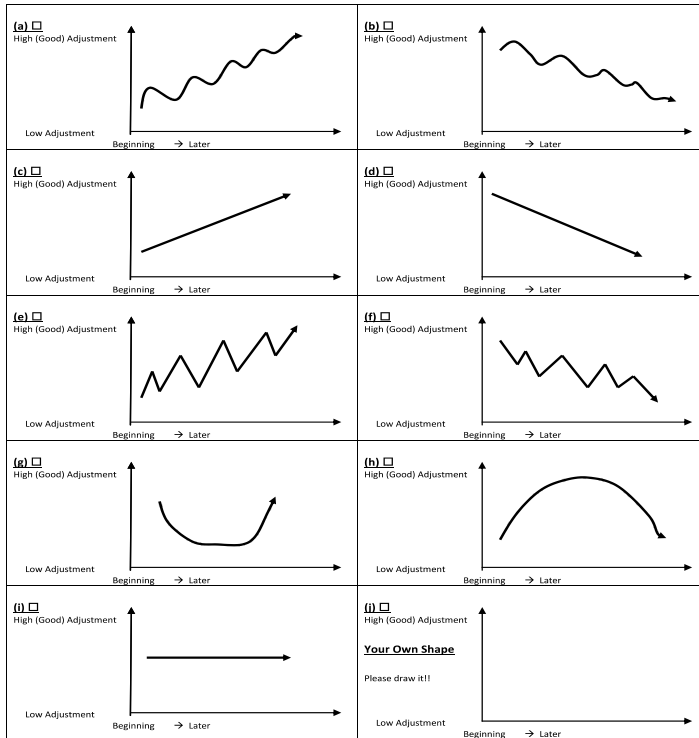
1	I am satisfied with my overall adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	I am satisfied with my academic adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I am satisfied with my sociocultural adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I am satisfied with my psychological adjustment in the UK	1	2	3	4	5	6

### Part 12. Match your situation with a proper graph.

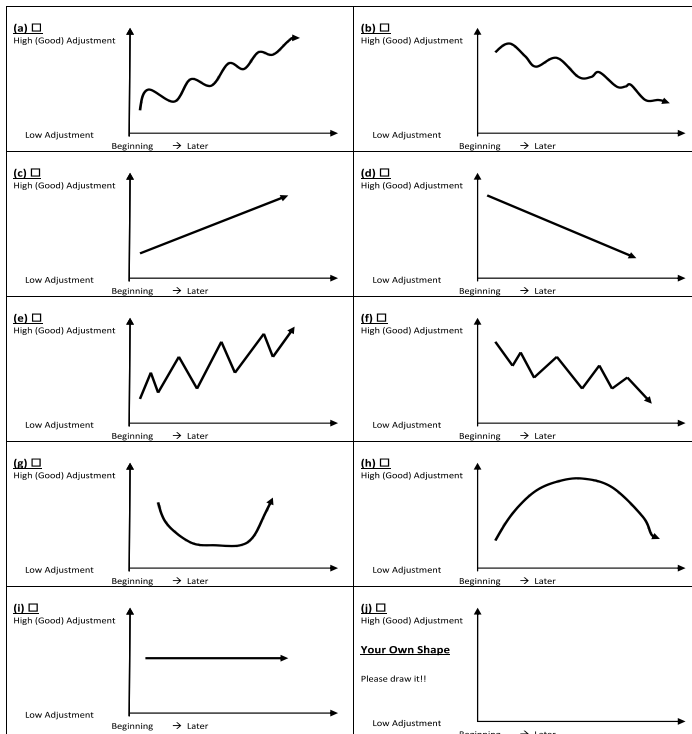
1. Which graph suits your academic adjustment best? Please tick it.

<p><b>(a)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>	<p><b>(b)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>
<p><b>(c)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>	<p><b>(d)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>
<p><b>(e)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>	<p><b>(f)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>
<p><b>(g)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>	<p><b>(h)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>
<p><b>(i)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>	<p><b>(j)</b> <input type="checkbox"/> High (Good) Adjustment</p> <p><b>Your Own Shape</b></p> <p>Please draw it!!</p> <p>Low Adjustment Beginning → Later</p>

2. Which graph suits your sociocultural adjustment best? Please tick it.

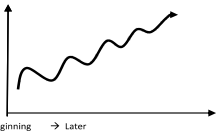
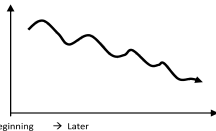
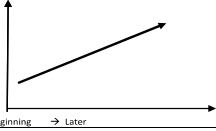
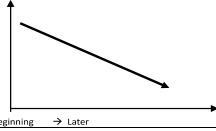
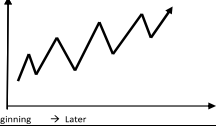
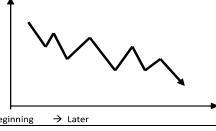
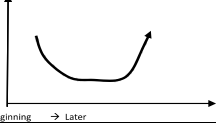
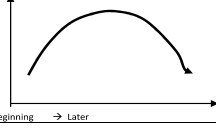
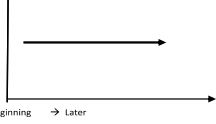



3. Which graph suits your psychological adjustment best? Please tick it.





4. Which graph suits your overall adjustment best? Please tick it.

<input type="checkbox"/> (a) High (Good) Adjustment 	<input type="checkbox"/> (b) High (Good) Adjustment 
<input type="checkbox"/> (c) High (Good) Adjustment 	<input type="checkbox"/> (d) High (Good) Adjustment 
<input type="checkbox"/> (e) High (Good) Adjustment 	<input type="checkbox"/> (f) High (Good) Adjustment 
<input type="checkbox"/> (g) High (Good) Adjustment 	<input type="checkbox"/> (h) High (Good) Adjustment 
<input type="checkbox"/> (i) High (Good) Adjustment 	<input type="checkbox"/> (j) High (Good) Adjustment <b>Your Own Shape</b> Please draw it!! 

*Are there any other comments you would like to add about yourself and your year in the UK?*

*Please feel free to write as much as you like below:*

That is the end of the survey.

Thanks for helping me with my research project!

Xuan Zhao

## Appendix D: Information Sheet



### **Title of study:**

Understanding international postgraduate students' adjustment in a British university: motivations for study abroad and subsequent academic, sociocultural and psychological experiences

### **Invitation and Brief Summary**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without any penalty or loss of benefits.

### **What is the purpose of the research?**

This research seeks to investigate the reasons why international students study abroad and their academic, sociocultural and psychological adjustment experiences in a British university. And there are three waves of interviews with the same interviewees with each lasting about 30 minutes. The first interview will be conducted at the beginning of the programme of study (October Time 1), exploring (1) the international MA Degree students' motivations for study abroad, (2) their expectations in academic studies, sociocultural and psychological experiences. The second interview round (February, Time 2) will be scheduled at the beginning of the second semester, in order to investigate adjustment in the early sojourn stage. The third interview round will be conducted towards the end of their program of study (June, Time 3) to discover whether there are some improvements or differences in their adjustment experiences over time. All the interviews will be audio recorded with the participants' permission, which would make it easier for the later review and transcription.

### **What information will be collected and who will have access to the information collected?**

As data is concerned, its storage is important. It is the researcher's responsibility to keep the data secure, open all the details to the participants and do not pass the data to others without permission. All data will be kept in a safe location on a password-protected PC. Besides, during the interviews, participants will be assured that they do not have to answer any questions that might make them feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, informed consent will be obtained from the participants prior to data collection, and the research process will follow BERA (British Educational Research Association) guidelines of good research practice.

**Who should I contact for further information relating to the research?**

Xuan Zhao

Email: [x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:x.zhao15@ncl.ac.uk)

Tel: 07599858380

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

## Appendix E: Interview consent form



*I confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):*

I confirm that I have understood the information given to me and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular questions, I am free to decline.	
I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials and will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree for this interview to be tape-recorded. I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in any conference presentation, report or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one other than the researcher will be allowed access to the original recording.	
I agree that anonymised transcripts will be kept for future research purposes such as publications related to this study after the completion of the study.	
I agree to take part in this interview.	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## **Appendix F: Interview guide T1 (October)**

### **Motivations for studying abroad**

1. What factors motivated you to pursue overseas study?
2. When did you decide to study in the UK and how long did you prepare for it?
3. To what extent, would you say, was your decision to study abroad influenced by others?
4. What is your plan after completing your studies in the UK? (For instance, career plan, further study plan or life plan)
5. Why did you decide to study in the northeast?
6. What are your impressions about the UK so far?
7. What were your expectations for study abroad prior to your arrival?

### **Academic experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general academic experience has been since you came to the UK?
2. Have you ever experienced any academic difficulty since you came to the UK? Has the difficulty been solved yet? Where did you ask for help and how did you cope with the difficulty?
3. Are you happy/satisfied with your UK academic experience so far? Why?
4. What are your expectations for your future academic experience?

### **Socio-cultural experience**

1. What is your first impression about your UK socio-cultural experience?
2. Could you please talk about how your general sociocultural experience has been since you came to the UK?
3. Are you happy/ satisfied with your UK sociocultural experience so far? Why?
4. How much time, would you say, do you spend with each of these groups? (People from your own country, British people, other international students)

### **Psychological experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general psychological experience has been since you came to the UK?
2. Are you happy/ satisfied with your UK psychological experience so far? Why?

### **Overall experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your overall adjustment experience has been since you came to the UK?

2. Are you happy/ satisfied with your UK overall adjustment experience so far? Why?

**Is there anything else you wish to add at this point?**

## **Appendix G: Interview guide T2 (February)**

### **Academic experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general academic experience has been since you since our last talk?
2. How is your academic performance so far?
3. Have you ever experienced any academic difficulty since our last talk? Has the difficulty been solved yet? Where did you ask for help and how did you cope with the difficulty?
4. Are you happy/satisfied with your UK academic experience so far? Why?

### **Sociocultural experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general sociocultural experience has been since our last talk?
2. Could you please talk about what UK socio-cultural experience makes you have the deepest impression?
3. Have you ever experienced any difficulty regarding your socio-cultural adaptation or UK daily life? Has the difficulty been solved yet?
4. How much time, would you say, do you spend with each of these groups? (People from your own country, British people, other international students)
5. Are you happy/satisfied with your UK sociocultural experience so far? Why?

### **Psychological experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general psychological experience has been since you came to the UK?
2. Are you happy/ satisfied with your UK psychological experience so far? Why?

### **Overall experience**

1. How you experienced your first semester?
2. How you feel over the last few months?
5. Are there any changes from when you first arrived in the UK?
7. What are your impressions of the local environment and the local people?
8. What has been the (most) academically or sociocultural challenging portion of your experience in the UK?
9. How does this influence your sense of psychological well-being while in the UK?

**Is there anything from your side that you would like to add?**



## **Appendix H: Interview guide T3 (June)**

### **Academic experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general academic experience has been since you since our last talk?
2. How is your academic performance so far?
3. Have you ever experienced any academic difficulty since you started your current study program in the UK? Has the difficulty been solved yet? Where did you ask for help and how did you cope with the difficulty?
4. Will this influence your sense of psychological well-being in the UK?
5. How is your interaction/relationship with your teachers and classmates?
6. If let you have the chance to go back to the beginning, what would you do in order to make your academic experience better?
7. Are you happy/satisfied with your UK academic experience? Why?
8. Do you have any suggestion regarding your academic experience and/or study program to the university?

### **Sociocultural experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general sociocultural experience has been since our last talk?
2. Could you please talk about what UK sociocultural experience makes you have the deepest impression?
3. Have you ever experienced any difficulty regarding your sociocultural adaptation or UK daily life? Has the difficulty been solved yet? Where did you ask for help and how did you cope with the difficulty?
4. Will this influence your sense of psychological well-being in the UK?
5. Have you ever used the university support services/resources to help/improve your life adaptation? Are these services/resources very helpful?
6. How is your friendship and interaction with your friends, other students, and local people?
7. Have you ever participated in any activity with local British people? What do you think/feel about it?
8. Have you ever participated in any activity with other students? What do you think/feel about it?

9. Do you often interact with students/people from your home country or the same/similar culture as yours? How is(was) it? Do you often ask for help from them?
10. What is your attitude toward the local UK culture and your UK daily life? Do you accept, refuse, ignore, close yourself, or try to adjust to the local things here? Could you please take an example?
11. Could you please take an example and describe something in the UK, which is particularly different from that in your home culture/country? Which one do you prefer? The UK one or the one in your home country? Why?
12. Are you happy/ satisfied with your UK sociocultural experience? Why?
13. Do you have any suggestion regarding your sociocultural experience to other (or, future) international students?

### **Psychological experience**

1. Could you please talk about how your general psychological experience has been since our last talk?
2. Have you ever experienced any difficulty regarding your psychological adaptation?
3. Where did you ask for help and how did you cope with then psychological difficulty?
4. Have you ever used the university counselling service?
5. Are you happy/ satisfied with your UK psychological experience? Why?
6. Do you have any suggestion regarding your psychological experience to other (or, future) international students?

### **Overall experience**

1. Looking back over the last nine months, please outline for me your experiences over time.
2. How did this year in the UK compare to the expectations you had pre-arrival?
3. Are there any changes from when you first arrived in the UK?
4. If given the chance again, will you still choose to study here? Why?
5. What is the most challenging part of your life in the UK? How does this influence your sense of psychological well-being in the UK?
6. How satisfied are you with the social support you receive from the people around you? Who do you turn to for academic support? Who do you turn to for emotional support?
7. What is your advice for other prospective international students intending to study in the UK and University of North East?

8. From your personal experience in the UK, could you please talk about what the advantages/disadvantages are for you to study abroad (in the UK/ North East)?

9. Is there anything from your side that you would like to add?

**Visual graph**

1. Which graph suits your academic adjustment best? Why?
2. Which graph suits your sociocultural adjustment best? Why?
3. Which graph suits your psychological adjustment best? Why?
4. Which graph suits your overall adjustment best? Why?

